

THE MAGIC FLUTE

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

BOOKS IN ENGLISH:

The Lord Magicians, Solkeo publisher, 2015,
is a philosophical trilogy on mysticism written as a fantasy tale
with the background of France in the Middle Ages.

volume 1: *The Knight of the Flower*,

volume 2: *The Lady of Noble Love*,

volume 3: *The Knight of the Boar*,

Conrad & Alice

Conrad, an elderly South African pensioner, and Alice, a young French psychologist, work together as crime investigators.

1 *The mad murder*, Yvelinédition, 2017.

2 *The anti-speciesism murder*, Yvelinédition, 2017.

The Magic Flute, to be published in 2017.

BOOKS IN FRENCH:

Le Chevalier à la Fleur, éditions Déjà, 2001.

Roman philosophique et mystique écrit à la manière d'un conte fantastique sur fond de Moyen-Âge en France.

Les Seigneurs Magiciens, éditions Clair de terre, 2005.

Bande dessinée inspirée du roman *Le Chevalier à la Fleur*.

Guy Marais, détective privé

Les mésaventures comiques d'un détective privé sud-africain à Paris.

1 *Les clients mortels*, Yvelinédition, 2010.

2 *L'or de la mort*, Yvelinédition, 2010.

3 *Association mortelle de malfaiteurs*, Yvelinédition, 2011.

4 *Crime fatal en bande désorganisée*, Yvelinédition, 2011.

5 *Homicide volontaire en flagrant délit*, Yvelinédition, 2012.

6 *Non-assistance à personne enragée*, Yvelinédition, 2012.

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8 *Erreur fatale sur la personne*, Yvelinédition, 2014.

9 *Mystère et cupidité au musée du Louvre*, Yvelinédition, 2015.

10 *La fin du 36, quai des Orfèvres*, Yvelinédition, 2016.

Bandes dessinées tirées des romans du même titre:

1 *L'Or de la mort*, Yvelinédition, 2015.

2 *Mystère et cupidité au musée du Louvre*, Yvelinédition, 2016.

To my daughter, Fleur.

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CHAPTER 1

THE DRAGON'S AGONY

At first there was only darkness. Then, as one became accustomed to the feeble light, it was possible to distinguish a large flat reddish object swaying from side to side like a sleepy snake. Suddenly the forked tongue jerked back into the throat ripping itself on the fangs that lined the creature's jaws. The saliva in the jowls was overrun by the tongue's blood and began dripping down the chin onto the ground where it formed an ever widening pool. The jaws opened wider baring the glinting fangs with drops of blood oozing down them. The lips drew back showing their wide cracks and exposing the scaly green-black gums from which the fangs stuck out like icicles.

Tears flowed from the two small bright red eyes. The long pointed ears were almost invisible as they flattened themselves thereby exposing the three sharp horns like the naked masts of a sailing ship. The nauseous breath was pumped into the cavern's stale air through the nostrils which throbbed in rhythm to the bat-like wings twitching. The draught caused

by the wings' frantic efforts dispersed the grey smoke being puffed out by the nostrils. As breathing became more and more difficult the entire body was overcome by convulsion and heaved to and fro like a rudderless ship in heavy seas. The tail lashed out wildly and was crushed on several occasions by the hind legs' uncontrolled stamping. The claws of the fore-legs dug deeply into the ground to prevent the frenzied creature from collapsing.

The weak uncertain light came from the many torches stuck into the cavern's uneven rocky walls at irregular intervals and heights. Their flames threw moving shadows which only added to the uncanny atmosphere. The folds in the cavern's walls were pierced with holes in the most unexpected places giving access to tunnels. Some led to the mountain slopes outside, while others went down to the underground river. There was one going to the summit, but the Dragon kept it secret.

In the middle of the cavern's bumpy ground stood a smooth platform surrounded by flat steps of varying widths and heights. It was here that the Dragon had set up his magnificent throne. Usually it gave off vivid colours which kept on changing. But now it was dark. The brightness, as well as the colours changed according to the Dragon's moods. And right now he was in great pain. The Dragon's ugliness cut a sharp contrast with the beauty of the throne, so much so that one was terrified and enthralled at the same time.

The hideous monsters living in the cavern stood in silence. They trembled with fear. These devoted servants often saw their master in agony, yet each time it happened they could not help themselves from being overcome by the waves of suffering that the Dragon sent throughout the mountain.

Suddenly the long awaited scream burst out of the Dragon's throat. A blood curdling howl that would send the most ferocious wolf fleeing with its tail between its legs. The

monsters fell down. They whimpered and wailed like forlorn puppies before yielding to panic stricken spasms that made them claw and bite themselves and each other in frenzied blindness. They rolled over each other, clutching frantically whatever they could. Huge pieces of flesh were flung against the dusty cavern walls. Blood was splashing everywhere. A claw here, a wing there, an ear close by. Some monsters were totally torn apart. Others were maimed permanently.

On hearing the screams the goblins in the tunnels came to a halt with their weapons hanging loosely in their lifeless arms. The Dragon's despair shook the entire mountain, from the summit to the depths of the underground river. The strange water creatures stopped swimming and no more bubbles burst from the muddy river bed.

The lines of victims, chained by the neck in twos, entering and leaving the mountain under goblin escort, halted. All movement in the prisons, judgement rooms and torture chambers froze. Not a single victim thought of trying to escape the monsters and goblins who were temporarily neutralised.

For a moment all the torches in the mountain went out, setting off a wave of panic. "Is this the end of the Dragon's reign?" wondered his terrified servants. But as quickly as they went out the torches were relit with a single powerful puff of his smoking nostrils. Slowly but surely the usual uneasy calm atmosphere returned to the Dark Mountain. The monsters picked themselves up slowly and studied their wounds in silence. Vultures came swooping down to devour the remains. At times the monsters had to fight off the vultures who failed to distinguish between the dead and the living. Soon there were only vultures at the scene of the battle bickering over the torn flesh. The monsters gathered around the throne which was giving off bright dancing colours.

"Once again," said the Dragon to his assembled servants, "the King has sent a Prince to rescue a victim. We'll

do everything in our power to make his task as difficult as possible.”

CHAPTER 2

CROSSING THE ROCKY DESERT

The Dark Mountain was in the middle of a rocky desert without the slightest vegetation or form of life. Scorched by the sun during the day and frozen at night. The goblins were able to cross it because of the magic potion the Dragon gave them. The goblins often crossed the desert, as they had the task of taking and bringing the Dragon’s victims to and from the Dark Mountain. What a sorry sight it was to see the victims trudging along in single file across the bleached waste-lands, chained by the neck in twos, while the goblins prodded them on with their staffs. There were two main routes: one for going to the mountain and the other for leaving it. These two never crossed.

Each victim carried a glass jar and for each chained couple there was one with a jar of pickles and one with a jar of jam. The goblins needed to give their victims drops of magic potion to enable them to cross the desert and being stingy the goblins always waited until the last moment before giving a struggling victim the energy loaded drops.