



Beginning of Arrogance: A Paladin's Journey

Bryan Cole

Tellwell Talent

(410pp)

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Part of a series, Beginning of Arrogance is a high fantasy adventure filled with action and mystery.

A troubled band of warriors fights cannibalistic invaders in Bryan Cole's fantasy novel *Beginning of Arrogance*.

A champion of the temperamental sea god ReckNor, Krell has abilities and talents beyond those of normal humans. Having spent years alone on a deserted island, he is abrasive but also naive. He decides to use his talents in service of his adopted town, Watford, where he and a group of fighters of varying races—dwarves, orcs, humans, and halflings—will take on any threat, no matter how deadly, in exchange for coin. In the course of their adventuring, the group uncovers an insidious plot that could kill countless innocents. It puts their strength, unity, and youthful bravado to the ultimate test.

The story follows Krell and company as they embark on a series of quests, moving from battle to battle with brief rest periods in between. It moves at a consistent pace throughout. The many fight scenes are interspersed with contentious conversations—and occasional flirtations with the very different women the company encounters. But in conversation, the cast sometimes repeats points that were covered in prior conversations.

Krell and his group are ruthless fighters, though their behaviors are sometimes self-defeating. Though they face ever more ruthless opponents, including human smugglers and a legion of fierce sea creatures intent on destroying Watford, they persist in feuding among themselves. Because of their differing personalities and skill sets, they clash over every aspect of their partnership. Tension is derived from the question of whether the band will pull itself together enough to complete their missions and collect their rewards.

The animosity between Krell and Tristan, his main opponent, is tempered by his more cordial relationships with others, including Gerrard, a music-loving halfling, and a small dragon with whom Krell develops a strong, mystical bond. The rivalries wane only in moments of extreme peril, hinting at the possibility of a more cooperative, if not amicable, future as the group learns and matures. Characters come and go; not all survive the challenges they face, layering a sense of danger and tragedy into the story.

Krell's team uses a potent combination of brains, brawn, and magic as they confront both their mortal opponents and the indecipherable will of their gods. The glimpses shown of the religious system that guides them all in different ways are intriguing. Here, there are enigmatic gods whose wants and goals remain hidden from even their most faithful followers. An epic showdown in a crumbling tower against overwhelming odds allows the team to show off their strengths while highlighting weaknesses they still have to confront. Plenty of threats and secrets remain, laying a foreboding groundwork for future installments.

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EILEEN GONZALEZ (August 24, 2023)

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