

The Lost Legend

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*There is no greater treasure than knowledge
which is why all men fear and envy the scholars*

Foreword

A few years ago, after one of my many re-readings of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* I decided to sit down and write my own Opus Magnus. An epic fantasy novel detailing the heroic struggles of ordinary everyday folk called upon to perform extraordinary feats of bravery and overcome impossible odds in the age old battle between the forces of good and evil. It remains for now an unfinished project.

However no story exists within a vacuum except perhaps one set in the inky blackness of outer space, but I digress. In order for the world one is creating to be credible and believable it needs its own back-story, a fantasy within a fantasy as it were. Thus the lost legend was born outlining some of the folklore, legends and myths that would provide a narrative framework for future adventures in this strange and mysterious land. I hope you enjoy it for my travels may yet take me back here in search of more lost legends one day.

Prologue

My name is Scholasticies, the last of the scholars and I have travelled many leagues across treacherous lands to reach the ruins of the Golden Temple, a building as old as time itself. I come in search of a great treasure, not the vulgar kind as found in gold and jewels but a treasure of the mind.

Deep beneath the ruins in the temple catacombs lies a long lost archive full of ancient scrolls, parchments, papers, dusty tomes of long forgotten lore, legend and myth. Tales of great wars and bloody battles that have long since faded from the memories of men, stories of epic quests lost in the mists of time. The titanic struggles of valiant heroes and the treachery of fey villains, noble sacrifices made and the dark deeds committed, all forgotten by those who should have carried the flame to bring light into the darkness.

I Scholasticies have made it my life's work to recover these Lost Legends to remind men once more of what brave deeds they are capable of, as the darkness of the long night threatens once more to descend upon our fair lands. To inspire those with true and righteous hearts to action and warn those who would seek refuge in ignorance of the fate that awaits them.

Join me then as retell the first and perhaps greatest of all the Lost Legends of how our world came into being and of the heroes who forged the first and perhaps the greatest Kingdom of men and its fall.

Vallen and the Void

In the beginning there was the void and Vallen, the creator of all things, and in it he spied a small cold rock, alone in the dark. The Lord Vallen took pity upon the rock and upon the canvas of the void he painted the stars, named them and breathed life into them so they became the children of Vallen. His children also took pity upon the rock and shone their light upon it to warm it, they told it stories and sang to it.

Eventually the brightest of all Vallen's Children Shaula came to Vallen and begged him to give the rock life so that it might wonder at the splendour of the universe he had created and know of the warmth and love that the stars showered upon it.

Then Vallen went into his garden beyond the stars and took the sacred fruit of creation from the one tree, the giver of all life that he kept there, and bade Shaula and her brethren to use its seeds to give life to rock. Long and hard was their work and they laboured many days and nights to complete their task. Bringing to life the stories they told and the songs they sang to the rock. When it was finished they called Vallen and asked him to look upon their work. Lord Vallen saw that the rock was barren no longer, but teeming with life from the deepest ocean to the highest snow capped peak and declared it was good.

But Lord Vallen also declared that something yet was missing, so he took some clay from the earth that now covered the rock and moulded it into various shapes and one-by-one breathed life into them and set them down again upon the rock.

The first of the creatures he created were slender and elegant, slim of face and body, with high pointed ears. These Vallen called the elves, the children of the stars, declaring they would live to a great age, worshiping the children of Vallen and be the protectors of all they created upon the face of the earth.

Next he created the dwarfs, stout and hairy, strong both of heart and limb, lovers of rock. They would remind the earth of its roots long ago in the emptiness of the void and protect the foundations of all that lived above it and mine the many gems and other wonders that lay hidden there so that others might marvel at their beauty.

Last of all Vallen created man, a fragile creature, short of span and frail in limb, but to man he gave the greatest gift of all for he created him in his own image, that he might seek the wisdom of Vallen. "For the light that burns the brightest also burns the shortest." Spoke Vallen: "That is both man's blessing and his curse."

His children then looked upon the earth with wonder and saw that it was now complete and as they sang his praises the universe burnt all the more brightly in celebration of the life he had given to it.

But amid all this joy Hadar, Shaula's brother, grew bitter and envious. Long had he lived in his sister's shadow and craved his own place in the heavens where his and his splendour alone would be worshiped by all who saw him. So while Vallen's children celebrated he transformed himself into a dark serpent, black as ebony, secretly he slid into the garden beyond the stars and partook of the fruit of the one tree, with it came the knowledge of life and death, a dark and terrible power that hitherto only Vallen himself had possessed.

Hadar having gained the fruit returned not to the stars, but came upon the earth and hid in the caverns beneath the great mountains of the north where the dwarfs did not yet delve and in secret long did he live their attempting to master the knowledge that he had gained and many foul creatures did he create from the bitter sapling he had grown from the stolen fruit. Orcs, goblins, trolls and other foul beasts to do his bidding and trouble the lives of elves, dwarfs and men, but most foul of all were the brenalin, a corrupt abomination of the races that walked the earth. Grey as goblins, slender as elves, but with the faces of men, and strength of an orc they spread terror across the land. Tearing and feasting on the flesh of all living things with their evil fangs.

When the children of Vallen saw what Hadar had done they called a council of war and pleaded with Vallen to call forth death and destruction and wipe the name of Hadar from both the earth and the heavens. Vallen refused revealing that the troubles that now beset the earth were but the first test of men and that he would not wage war against Hadar. Therefore to Shaula he gave a sapling, also from the one tree, as pure as was the one Hadar kept corrupt and transforming her into a golden serpent bade her build a temple upon the earth around the tree as a beacon of light and hope against the darkness and despair of Hadar.

Then he declared that all must choose, and choose freely, which path to follow, that of Shaula or Hadar. That man must prove himself worthy of Vallen or perish in the attempt. Thus began the first age of men.

The First Age of Men

Long and bloody were the battles that raged across the first age. Kingdoms rose and fell, great leaders lost in the mist of time and none prevailed. Many were called to wonder at the beauty of the temple of Shaula and the one tree and pledged their lives in service to Vallen. Thus were born the knights of Vallen. An order that bore allegiance to no earthly King, but gave their lives in service to Shaula and pledged to uphold all that was true in the world of men and balance the forces of good against evil. But many also had a dark heart and worshiped Hadar and a great fortress arose in the North from whence great armies of fell beasts and men sallied forth to wreak havoc upon all who challenged his will. While the brenalin roamed far and wide striking terror into the hearts of all who crossed their path.

Then when all seemed lost, the dwarfs had retreated deep into their mines, the elves into their woods and darkness stalked the very boundaries of the Golden Temple a great warrior, Venhorn, arose from the ranks of the knights of Vallen.

His lineage uncertain, his origins unknown, some say he was Vallen himself in human form, but he rallied and united the divided houses of men, elves and dwarfs, drove back the dark horde from the temple, forging a mighty empire from the fragmented kingdoms of men. At the heart of this empire he built a mighty citadel and there he sat upon the throne of serpents. An ornate dais of silver and gold depicting the gold and ebony serpents locked in the eternal struggle for control of the fruits of the one tree.

From here he marshalled great armies of men, called forth the elves from the woods and issued orders to the great smiths of the dwarfen realms. And when all was ready a messenger from the fabled underground city of Bessencast came forth and delivered unto him the Serpent Sword, Helm of Kings and the mighty amour of the dragon fires into which their greatest smiths had poured all their might and magic.

Then, when thus arraigned in his amour, he rode forth upon a mighty stallion to the head of the forces he had assembled and bade them all, men, elf and dwarf to follow him to war and rid the earth of the evil that stalked their land. The ground trembled as they began their long march north towards the fortress of Hadar and all before them fled as ever onward they came to fight the final battle of the first age of men.

For many long months they laid siege to the great fortress in the mountains of the north until finally the gates were breeched and all the foul creatures of the earth either slain or driven out into the wilderness. Finally Venhorn entered the throne room of the palace of corruption at the very heart of the fortress where Hadar the dark serpent dwelt and challenged him thus. "Dark Serpent, dark are your deeds and darker still is your heart, come forth now and face your final judgement in the fire and steel of combat."

Hadar eyes burned with the red fire of hatred and he looked down on Venhorn with contempt. "Mortal, frail, feeble man, I will wipe you from the face of the earth, your name will mean nought and your empire will crumble into dust long before I am humbled, your bones will hang outside my palace to remind all of the fate that awaits those who dare challenge me."

Venhorn drew forth the Serpent Sword and approached the throne. "Come then dark lord and let us see who will be stricken from this earth."

Long and terrible was that fight. No mercy was shown or given as they battled to the death, the mighty serpent against the warrior and his enchanted blade. But the serpent's fire could not penetrate the armour that the dwarfs had fashioned with craft and skill, nor land a blow on the Helm of Kings whose magic repelled all he threw at it. In fury Hadar threw his very throne at Venhorn and watched it shatter harmlessly into a thousand shards of darkness and in fury cast down the great pillars that flanked it, but still Venhorn came at him and finally the hour of man's victory was at hand.

But in that moment when the serpent was undone and Venhorn raised his blade to strike the final blow, Hadar spun his treachery anew. He yielded to him and pleaded for mercy, claiming that he wished to seek the salvation of Vallen. Venhorn hearing the foul creatures request stayed his arm and his blade did not fall upon the serpents neck for Hadar, at the moment of his doom, had spied a chink in Venhorn's armour and let fly a poisoned claw gashing a cruel strangely

curved wound in his left side, recoiling in agony he let fly the serpent blade severing that poisoned paw with which the serpent had struck and staggered backwards.

Howling with pain and rage Hardar fled that ruinous throne room and descended deep into the secret catacombs beneath the dark fortress where none dare follow, to nurse his wounds and wallowing in the fury and hatred of men that now consumed him, did plot his revenge and spin anew his hateful webs of treachery and deceit.

Yet mighty though his poison was, Venhorn did not die. For the greatest physicians amongst all the elves tended him for many months until the wound was healed leaving a radiant snake-like scar running down his left side. But neither did he fully recover the vigour he had as a warrior and never again would he ride forth from the great citadel he had built to hunt or do battle. Instead he became the first Emperor of the great empire of men, a king amongst kings who had no equal, a wise and magnificent ruler to whom all looked for leadership and guidance. And in his later years he took an elven wife, Coryn in the tongues of men, who had nursed him through the long fever of the poison and she bore him twin sons, Cyndon and Kenon who each bore the radiant snake like scar of their father as a birth mark.

And at their coming of age to Cyndon he gave the Serpent Sword and Kenon the Helm of Kings and renounced the Serpent Throne forever declaring thus. "To Cyndon and his descendants I entrust the Sword of Serpents that he may call upon the knights of Vallen in the empires hour need. To Kenon and his descendants I give the Helm of Kings that he may oversee the Council of the Wise that I decreed from henceforth will govern all within the bounds of the empire for the greater good of those who seek its protection from evil. And know this as Cyndon and Kenon carry the mark of the scar so will all rightful heirs of the sword and helm bear this birthmark, the mark of Vallen, in recognition of their birth right."

And then he took the armour of the dragon fires and distributed it amongst those whom had he lead into battle in recognition of there right to claim a seat upon the Council he had created. To the dwarfs he gave the gauntlets for their hands had fashioned the weapons of Hadar's downfall. To the elves he gave his boots in recognition the many long leagues they had marched from their homes in the far forests of the east to do battle. To the Northern provinces who had faced the dark fortress of the north he gave the cuirass for they were the body of the empire. To the Southern provinces between the citadel and temple of Shaula he gave the greaves, for they were the legs on which the empire stood. To the Western and Eastern provinces he gave the vambraces for they were the powerful arms of the empire.

Then he and Coryn mounted two pure white mares and rode forth from the city towards the far kingdoms of the elves in the east and no mortal man ever cast eyes upon them again. Thus began the second and most bountiful age of men under the stewardship of Cyndon, Kenon and their kin.

The Second Age of Men

Yet the span of men is short and their memories shorter still, as years past the great battles and deeds of Venhorn faded from their minds passing into history and from history into myth and from myth into legend. Growing complacent in their time of plenty they forsook their pilgrimages to the Temple of Shaula to honour the tree. The old alliances between men, dwarfs and elves fell into disrepair and the knights of Vallen laboured alone against the evil that slowly crept from the north once more.

Many long ages of men had Hadar brooded on his defeat and saw now that the time was ripe to set forth his treachery and undo the work of men. He collected the dark shards of his throne and called his spies unto him. To each he gave a piece and commanded them to plant this seed of darkness in the hearts of men. Far and wide they travelled sowing discord and distrust, dividing each house against another. The great trade routes fell silent as once more the brenalin stalked the land preying on lonely, unwary travellers, while Hadar recalled his scattered tribes and began to rebuild his shattered armies.

And men heeded not the warnings of the knights of Vallen whose scouts had seen the storm clouds gathering in the north, for the Council of the Wise was split, north against south, east against west, dwarf against elf, man against all. For Hadar had planted the darkest shard of his throne in the heart of Kesth the rightful heir and holder of the Helm of Kings poisoning his mind against all who would council him, even Corlbus champion of the Serpent Sword. Kesth in the rage of darkness that consumed his heart banished Corlbus from the citadel and forswore the knights of Vallen, renouncing the path of the tree, forbidding on pain of death the veneration of Shaula.

Thus when a mighty horde of trolls and goblins came to lay waste to Bessencast, the great dwarfen city of the West, the Council of the Wise saw fit to forfeit its wisdom and no man or elf came to aid the dwarfs save Corlbus and the knights of Vallen, but too late was their arrival to save the glory of Bessencast. Its mighty forges were silenced, the great galleries stripped bare and all who could not escape slain, yet even as the horde celebrated its victory in the hall of kings, defacing the statues of its founders, Corlbus and his knights swept into the caverns in swift and terrible retribution. The Serpent Sword did not rest until Corlbus had stopped the heart of the great troll himself who led the assault and in disarray the horde had fled.

Bloody, bowed, but not yet beaten, Derfi, the bruised and battered King of the dwarfen realm carrying his great battleaxe of judgement returned to survey the ruin of his once great city and declared. "Know this. Like the great city of Bessencast, the alliance of dwarfs and men is forfeit; this city is lost as are the gauntlets of Venhorn lost in its ruin. Neither will the forges of the dragon fires be relit, or its galleries rebuilt, until the heirs of Venhorn reclaim them and forge a new alliance with the dwarfs. But to the knights of Vallen we are forever in debt for only they in the hour of need answered our call and they alone amongst men will be welcome amongst us henceforth." And bowing gracefully, despite his many

wounds, he left Corlbus at the broken gates of Bessencast to lead his people to their lesser cities in the mountains of the far west.

Yet the sack of Bessencast was but a feint and Hadar worried not that the horde had been lost for a great army of orcs was marching unopposed through the provinces of the north to besiege the citadel itself. Yet Kesth heeded not the warnings of his scouts and called not to the council for aid seeing only a conspiracy to deprive him of the Serpent Throne by the craven kings of the north. And none came forth to challenge the orcs or hinder their march as they spread across the land like a dark plague of locust intent on devouring the citadel.

Thus it was late in the day that a messenger of the temple came to Corlbus to warn him of the orcs approach and the refusal of Kesth to make ready for the defence of the citadel. Corlbus called the weary knights to arms once more and bade them ride with all haste to the defence of the Serpent Throne. Riding at their head he never faltered nor stopped for rest riding ever eastwards, blowing the great horn of Carth (Whose mighty deeds are not told here) calling all good men and true to the defence of their realm.

Yet while they were still a full day's ride away from the citadel they saw the sky glowing a deep and fiery red and a great pall of smoke rising in the east. Spurring his horse on ever faster Corlbus was first to reach the smoking ruin where once the mighty Citadel of Kings had stood, and amid the fires he found the body of Kesth impaled on the broken Serpent Throne, his chest cut open, heart ripped out, the Helm of Kings lying in mockery at his feet. Howling in rage Corlbus drew forth the Serpent Sword and holding it aloft swore an oath of death and vengeance on those who had violated Kesth.

And turning to his Knights and the men of the west who had heeded his call to arms, he called on them, who looked upon the fall of the great citadel with fear and wonder, to follow him into one last battle and smite those who had defiled it.

"Knights of Vallen, and all good men and true, follow me, follow me now, too long have we rested and grown soft in our contentment, while Hadar plots our downfall. We will destroy the orcs as we destroyed the horde that sacked Bessencast. We will show now that we, the heirs of Venhorn, are strong and will forever prevail over Hadar the destroyer of all things" And with a mighty cheer they set off in pursuit of the orcs, calling all true men of the north in the settlements through which they came to take up arms.

Barroc the dark orc and greatest of all Hadar generals who had led the sack of the citadel now lead the army back to the north with a booty of stolen treasure to aid his Dark Lord in rebuilding the great fortress. And long before he saw Corlbus he heard the great horn of Carth stirring the hearts of men, striking fear into the fell beasts that he commanded. Thus sensing the pursuit Barroc called his lieutenants to him and told them his plan. In the highlands of the north at the pass of Byhaven Barrows where the borders of the Northern provinces gave way to the barren wastes of the blasted plains, they would lay an ambush in the ancient burial grounds of long forgotten men.

Corlbus's fury knew no bounds and without care or fear he led his men into the very heart of the barrows of Byhaven where they found themselves surrounded. Barroc confident of delivering the last of Venhorn's line to his master stood atop the highest barrow to gloat at his master's victory over men.

“Where are the mighty Knights of Vallen now? Who now can save the heir of Venhorn from his fate? Your bones will hang from my master fortress in Venhorn’s stead as a lesson to all who challenge the might and wisdom of Hadar, the dark lord who will yet have mastery of men and earth. Send forth the last heir of Venhorn to meet me, Barroc the champion of Hadar, and I may spare you yet, for in his defeat you will see the unending power of my lord and master Hadar and those of you who renounce the path of tree will be permitted to live in service to him.”

Then Corlbus came forth and also stood atop the barrow.

“What you call service is nought but slavery, foul mouthpiece of the dark destroyer, corrupter of all good things. No man lives forever that is the both the curse and blessing of Vallen and however brief my life may be I choose to live it as a free man not as a slave.”

Then Barroc held aloft the Sword of Darkness in his right hand, a blade so black and evil no light ever escaped from it.

“Behold the blade of darkness forged from the shards of my master’s throne with it I will banish you from this earth and end your line forever.” Then he opened his left hand in which he held a small shard of ebony darkness. “And behold also the dagger of corruption which I plucked from the beating heart of Kesth, placed there so that he might amuse my master while he permitted him to live.”

Then without a word Corlbus placed the Helm of Kings upon his head, slung the great horn of Carth across his back, and advanced towards Barroc the Serpent Sword glinting in the late afternoon sun and battle was joined.

Across the long forgotten souls beneath their feet the battle raged from one end of the barrow to the other, neither able to land a telling blow, as both their armies waited to see which champion would prevail. Then as the sun began to set Barroc’s dark blade crashed against Corlbus’s and sent him spinning to the ground, a mighty roar went up from the orcs scenting the blood of men was at hand, as dazed Corlbus knelt before the mighty orc with dark blade raised in readiness to strike. Yet Corlbus looked not to his sword for salvation but the great horn of Carth, pressing it to his lips and letting forth a mighty blast before Barroc could strike.

The ground trembled, groaned and was ripped asunder as out of the barrows poured a ghostly army of long forgotten warriors to answer the call of Carth the Avenger. All around them was consumed in fear and terror as thousands of skeletons clad in ancient armour devoured the army of orcs. Corlbus’s seized his chance and swinging his sword cut the legs from beneath Barroc. Howling in pain and anger Barroc fell. Yet even as Corlbus plunged the Serpent Sword into the Orc’s heart, sending him back to the darkness from whence he came, Barroc let fly the dagger of corruption striking Corlbus a mortal blow. When the barrows closed again and all was silent once more, not a single orc remained. Only the pale body of Corlbus who breathed a while yet could be found on the great barrow of Carth.

Corlbus called the knights of Vallen to him. “My friends, my life is spent, as are the forces of evil for a while yet. But the line is broken, the empire has fallen, you must take now the helm and sword to the temple of Shaula and look for the coming of a new heir who bears the mark of Vallen to reclaim the kingdom of men and rid the world of evil. These tokens of authority, the Helm of Kings and the

Serpent Sword will be held in the safe keeping of the ancient sage, protector of the temple, voice of Shaula, who until the appointed time will oversee the Council of the Wise. I go now to join my fathers.”

Then the knights raised up his body up on a mighty bier and carried him back to the temple of Shaula to lay him to rest in the tomb of champions beside his fathers who surrounded the great tomb of Cyndon, while the body of Kesth was taken to his final resting place in the eternal hall of kings beneath the smouldering ruins of the citadel.

Yet the dwarfs heeded not the call of the sage to the new Council of the Wise at the temple recalling the words Derfi had spoken to Corlbus at the sack of Bessencast. While the men of the north were proudly claiming they alone held the line against the evil still lurking in the north and should lead. In mockery the men of the west pointed to the army of orcs that had marched unopposed through the northern lands and murdered Kesth and claimed that they alone had answered the call to arms. Then the men of the east spoke of the western provinces betrayal of the dwarfs of Bessencast. While the men of the south claimed stewardship of the empire on the grounds they protected the temple.

Finally the elves declared the failure of Venhorn’s line had betrayed the weaknesses of men and in that the failure the old alliances also fell. That each must look to their own defence from the evil that would rise again in the north and count not on the hope and folly of men to come to their aid.

Then the sage spoke.

“Long have I listened to the foolish pride of the so called wise men who sit before me, each seeking only the glory of his own at the expense of others. But long have I sat in the council of Shaula and seen many things, past present and future. Know this, the citadel is lost and the empire with it, it’s time is past and we must now look to a new age. Hadar’s armies are spent, but he is not and the Knights of Vallen cannot hold back forever the tide of evil that will come once more from the north. Alone you will fail and fall under his power one-by-one and in time he will have mastery of you all. But the line that is broken can be renewed and to you all Shaula offers a promise, the gift of a new heir as yet unborn who will bear the mark of Vallen and forge a new alliance from the ruins of the old to face once more the evil of Hadar. When that time comes I will recall the Council of the Wise to sit in judgement on those who claim the birthright of Venhorn and assess their claim to your undying loyalty.”

Thus ended the second age of men.

Epilogue

My arm is weary and my heart aches for rest, yet the restless spirits that possess this place drive me on. I lift up my lamp and survey the long shelves of ancient texts that stretch out before me into the darkness. Where next do I search for inspiration? What great deeds will I uncover? What stories wait to be told?

I am Scholastics, the last of the scholars and I have made it my life's work to recover the Lost Legends...

