



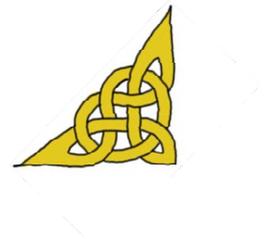
Tir Nan Beo – Cursed Lands

Tales of a Bard

Ravens watch journey

Part of Dumnonni

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Ravens watch journey

This is the tale of the war band that travelled through Semnoness territory into the unknown lands of the Atuatucii. A tale told and heard around many campfires and many clans of Tir Nan Beo. Though it might not have been a story of Kings and Queens and world shaking wars it was the first tale of bravery directly linked to the banner man of Oswald, King of the Usipeti. The tale was often requested and told where ever the bards went. This is the tale of the Raven watch journey.

Just before the borders of Gall Heim, mere footsteps of the lands of Semnoness, the chosen men and woman of Oswald, King of the Usipeti gathered. From the eighteen chosen just six had managed to come through alive. Some had died in enemy territories and some had other reasons, reasons only a King could understand and challenge. Under the six were three Nervii, Kelmomas the late, Prince of the Nervii, Donora, female warrior and advisor to the prince and Covis the priest, later named Covis of the dead Heart. On the other side stood two Frisii warriors, Tjerk, named the Giant and his brother Oddert, grandsons of Dauwe. Last, stood Una, female wyrd user of the Menapa Menapii and known friend to the creatures of these lands.

A short silence proved reason for the Nervii and the Frisii to take deep breath before they began their journey. Both clans were constantly fighting eachother and although none called it war, it was fighting enough for Oswald to take charge and set things straight. Both parties knew that the King had favoured the Nervii though both knew not why Oswald favoured them. It seemed that loyalty and trust were the biggest threats or challenges on this quest and with that thought the party began to move, ever closer to the border of Menapii and Semnoness lands.

Just before they crossed the borders of Semnoness lands the party encountered a few Menapii of the Menapa clan who offered them the blessings of the earth. Well intended blessings and free of oath they offered their kindred spirits to the party. Blessings they all in return accepted wholeheartedly, except for the Frisii. They did not accept the generous offer, but declined with dark coloured words, seemingly confident that the creatures of the lands had no part to play in the quest beforehand.

As it were the party went on, straight into the lands of the Semnoness, the hatred foe of many clans. The Semnoness were feared for their warriors, their poisoned arrows and their terrifying shamans. The very air seemed to shiffer when all of them past the unseen line between friend and bitter enemy. A line unknown to the curse of these lands, but a line best remembered by those defending it.





It was not long before the first skirmishers began to emerge from the darker parts of the forest and the group was forced to fight off many Semnoness warriors. Luckily the skirmishers were divided and were not fighting as a group. This made them an easy prey for the party with their thick armoured warriors who made short fights of them all. From everywhere fast moving Semnoness kept on pushing the group deeper into their lands hoping to corner them so their archers could begin shooting their paralyzing arrows at the party. A cat and mouse game started to take hold on the warriors, whose thick layers of chain and leather prevented them from sudden and agile outbreaks to kill the deadly archers and their feared arrows.

When the party was driven towards a small pond the party was finally surrounded by Semnoness warriors. A fierce battle followed in which the party was able in killing Semnoness warriors from every side while protecting the non-warriors with their shield against the incoming arrows. Through high raised shields a black arrow hit Covis and as he fell to the ground the odds were suddenly changed. In a rush the Group, still fighting, searched the borders of the pond. All in the hope to find the right herbs explained to them by the friendly Menapii who, besides blessings, had advised how to tread the poison after being shot. Was it luck, devotion of Covis to his God or the strange bond between Una and the creatures of these lands? No one knows and no answer was ever given to this question. But the herbs were found in such speed, that they were able to treat Covis just in time. Una took care of Covis, the rest of the party was able to fight off the sudden increase of attacks. The battle reached its peak as they had to go straight through the main host of warriors who they slew one and all before running forwards a more friendly area.

In their run to friendly areas the chosen of Oswald were met with a party of Norse, who had just fought off several Semnoness themselves. One of the Tir Nan Beo Norse named himself Wilco, son of Jorg and told the group that their group had been to the Valeda of the Bructerii, an oracle woman of great reputation. Their Group was much larger than this, but also they had travelled through the Semnoness territory and had lost many a good warrior doing so. Wilco could not speak about the words the Valeda had spoken, as his Jarl had to hear them first. Before each party went their own way, Una stepped forward. She gave some of the herbs she had found to the Norse, who were very thankful and returned the favour with advice for the upcoming Menapii settlement of the Morini and a self-made map of the area.

The settlement was no more than a shrine with some tents around it, yet seemingly the settlement was tough enough to have fought off the constant attacks of the Semnoness and Formorians. Before entering the settlement the group was greeted by Ebbe, the Elder of this Settlement. He and two of his daughters welcomed the group respectfully, though made the message plain and clear that they were no banner man of King Oswald and that hospitality was not easily given. Word had spread that the banner man of Oswald had slain some of the guardians of the Menapa Menapii. This was not a good thing for the Menapii, regardless who had given the order. Una was given hospitality instantly, yet the rest was challenged with a very stubborn elder. The Nervii talked and talked until Ebbe agreed on hospitality on two conditions. The first one was that there would be no metal in the settlement. The second condition was that they had to fight an honour dual to decide what blame there was on their part in the slaying of the Menapa guardians. In this dual the creatures of these lands would Judge the champion of the group for their part in it.





In the end all metal was removed and the Nervii went into the settlement. The Frisii however removed their metal, but refused a second time the hospitality and goodwill of the Menapii and stayed outside the gate. Inside the settlement the Nervii and the Morini talked and exchanged food and drinks. Stories were told for amusement and Una was given peace by entering the shrine within the settlement. While eating the group suddenly saw white masked men walking outside the borders of the settlement. When the party asked about them, they were told that these men were called Aryans. They are known as a terrifying clan, known for their wars in the night. They were never seen in the day, only at the twilight and sunset, the times between darkness and light, between day and night. The Aryans were as snakes in hiding. Legends were told about their feats and it was clear that the Morini were terrified by them. The Aryans however just walked outside, pointed at the Nervii and then left the area. Ebbe told the group that the Aryans came here a few moons ago and did nothing.

Ebbe stood up and told the party that he would get his champion for the honour dual between him and Kelmomas the late, Prins of the Nervii, who honour full took it upon himself to defend the Nervii honour and the honour of the group.

Before the dual was fought there was a sudden dispute between the champion of the Morini Menapii, named Kurt the Loyal and a Young female who was promised to him by her father. The woman however was in love with a Bructerii farmer with few lands and no warrior skill whatsoever. In a fight the father of the Young female was killed, though all believed it was not her intend. A long debate followed in which the Nervii advised the woman to wed to the champion, while the Frisii advised beating up the Bructerii man and then sending him away. Finally Ebbe decided that the female was to wed the champion, unless the Bructerii man could find a champion to fight on his behalf.

The Bructerii man was send away to fetch himself a champion. As soon as he left they all heard screams coming from the forest. Here one of the daughters of Ebbe and Hannah, daughter of Gildah, a trader of the Usipetti, were attacked by Tir Nan Beo Formorians. Kurt, the champion of the Morini Menapii began to run towards the area and immediately engaged in battle. He was followed by the two Frisii brothers and Ebbe with one of his daughters. The Formorians were fierce and after a hard battle and much armour damaged, the Formorians were slain. Kelmomas the late, honouring his name came late for joining in the battle.

His fight however was the dual with Kurt the Loyal, Champion of this Morini Settlement. The dual was set on first blood, where Ebbe and Covis were appointed as witnesses. The dual began and first blood was drawn from Kurt. The Nervii Prins took his victory. The creatures of these Morini lands judged the Nervii without guilt in the slaying of the guardians of the Fae in Gall Heim and with that news the Sun set.





Before the party departed the settlement, the Morini had told them that they had not seen the Atuatucii in years, but they were once famous for their priestess of death. They could hold someone in these lands even when death was almost upon them. They used to trade with them, but as a result of the ever more violent attacks of the Semnoness this trade had decreased until non-existent. With this last news exchanged the party bid their farewells and picked up their journey again.

The light of the sun was just gone when they encountered three people. A female and a man were sitting next to a dying girl. A bowl of blood stood steady under a blood drained tunic. The dying girl herself had kept the bowl in place. Tears were falling silent in an eerie kind of way. As Una approached she suddenly felt blood coming from her nose and eyes. The area itself was completely deserted and the scene somehow looked terrifying. When questions were asked the two living persons shook their heads violently as if they hoped the group would pass them and leave them. But the party did not decide to pass. Instead they kept asking questions until finally response came from the two persons. They told the party that they were Atuaucii and the dying girl before them was their sister. It was clear that terror had taken hold of them in such manner that no one could set them free. They gave little answer, but begged the group to go away. The party however again did not decide to go away. They insisted and pressed on to speak with their leaders. One of the two, the female in the end stood up and left. The party hoped to meet their leader soon.

When she returned the dying girl had died and the brother holding her was beyond grief. The female Atuatucii took the bowl of blood out of her sister's arms and began to walk, not once looking behind. Words of sacrifice were heard, pleas to the group to leave for their own safety. It was all for nothing as the party began to walk to follow the female. The brother stepped up and walked to the Frisii and whispered of traps, but the party had already concluded as such, but they were bound to Oswald to see this through. Their journey led them to a small pond of water, under a sunless sky. The female Atuatucii placed the bowl of blood on the ground and stood then very still. In the dark a woman stood there to meet them, dressed in furs and woods. Her headdress bolt and unrevealing, her voice cold and menacing, her unseen eyes dark and powerful. She was named Atar and with every beastly movement she seemed to stir her surroundings. Wyrð circled round the pond hammering any of the wyrð users in the neighbourhood, trying to break their wits and will.

Atar looked at the group in front of her and asked Kelmomas to bring her the bowl of blood the female Atuatucii had placed on the ground. Kelmomas, seeing no harm, picked it up and walked towards Atar and gave the bowl to her. Atar began to spill the blood on the ground, giving it back to the earth and began to drink from it herself. The group, somewhat stunned by the scene revealed to them, recovered and began to speak of alliances and peace, of friendship and honour. But Atar the priestess of death had no ears for it all. She twisted as an animal, moving on four legs and spat words of anger back to them. In the end she stood tall, shouted out her name: "Atar, Atar!", then looked at the group holding their gaze for a moment and withdrew herself into the forest.





Before the party was realizing what had happened, Semnoness emerged everywhere from the shadows of the forest. Among them was a huge Semnoness Shaman, who was conjuring wyrd with every step he took towards them. A brutal battle began which seemed in favour for the Semnoness. The party killed Semnoness after Semnoness, but the huge Shaman cursed the chosen of Oswald for every kill they made. Curses filled the air pounding on the will of every member of the group. Their Armour was shattered, shields began to break, but the chosen did not retreat, they were holding their grounds. Even when the Shaman cursed Kelmomas that for every semnoness he killed he would again be late, the chosen did not waver. At last, the Shaman retreated, seemingly annoyed by the stubbornness of the group and faded in the shadows of the trees.

When peace seemed to return, Covis, for some reason, began to rattle words, praying to his God for power. Atar was lured back; to end the conversation the group had started. Covis felt how his mind was besieged by wyrd the instant that he began praying. Una felt shadows approaching full of menace and hatred. Creatures long exposed to the darkness of the lands and whispering words that made no sense to Una at all. Tjerk looked as Atar began to circle around Covis who in his turn tried to open his body for as much power he could get. Tjerk had to step in, had to save the Priest Covis before this wyrd battle would kill him utterly. Covis however heard nothing but the desire to overtake the power of Atar. With every wave of power he threw at her he felt his body screaming. Suddenly Oddert pushed a war hammer in Covis his hands. Atar's reaction to this was kneeling before Covis and exposing her chest. Around the scene, whispers of creatures began to chant "death,...death.." and Covis looked into the dark eyes of Atar which were beyond the veil of beasts and then crushed the hammer into Atars' chest with all his might.

On that moment multiple things started to happen. Some of the group heard a whispering voice speak "Covis, of the dead heart". Tjerk launched forward to fetch the still falling body of Covis, while Una began to scream that the heart of Covis had stopped beating. Atar stood up, chest broken, ribs crushed and began to walk backwards. She began to speak in a strange manner: "I am the Queen of this land and I have friends enough." After this she fled as a running beast into the darkness of the forest. Kelmomas gave the order to retreat, Covis, half in and out of shock was helped on his feet. Before they took the first step to retreat the Semnoness warriors began to press them again. They came running towards the chosen, with clearly one thing in mind: killing the chosen. Kill after kill the group fought through the forest retreating towards the Morini settlement they came from. After a long and exhausting retreat they finally found themselves without foes.





In the gloom a Druide named Araturix appeared, halve mad, crawling over the ground. He looked at Una whose blood was dripping from her nose and then to the others of the group around her. He had been to late building his ghost fence and was now facing the consequences of the night. Before the group went on he gazed at Donora and pulled a string of leather out of his cloth and bound it around her finger. Araturix spook his words while binding the leather string around her finger. She was not allowed to remove it until Beltane, or she had to come back to the druid to drink his blood. With this strange task the group followed their trail only to find the settlement, with all inhabitants, dead on the ground. The bodies were just killed and somehow it felt that the party had just come too late to their aid. Two Aryan masks were found, one placed on the chair where Kelmomas had been seated.

There were no Aryans around, but the party felt watchful eyes beyond the trees within the dark shadows. Exhaustion, ruined armour and wounds made them decide to stay nonetheless, as they had no power left to walk further. The group had fulfilled the task set upon them by Oswald, King of the Usipeti. They had sought the friendship of an ally, but found a bitter enemy instead. As they sat around the once Morini campfire, they threw the mask of the Aryan's outside the settlement. The next morning the masks were gone. Later that night some traders had joined the group and had heard the story of their quest. It was mostly Una who told it, her honey sweet words touching the hearts of all who heard it. This was the tale she and the others told them.

