



Tir Nan Beo – Cursed Lands

Tales of a Bard

Weaving of Words

Part of Dumnonni Chronicles

<http://www.tirnanbeo.com>





Weaving of words

As the sun tried to raise itself above the cold morning skies, the tale of Oswald and his chosen still echoed across the lands. The prophecies were heard, the words had been woven and all that remained was the bitter taste from what it had brought them. It was strange to see so many linger in their thoughts, while all knew little of the prophecies intent. As the people walked back to their homes their minds played riddles to which they had no answers. There was doom in the future and hope as well, but none seemed to phantom what path was laid out for them. Oswald had heard what he had to hear and brought back the chosen for another day of life. There was glory in their tale, yet it all seemed grim compared to the season ahead and the promise of coming wars. The bard picked up his cup and looked around him. He knew the tale he had told was not one of happiness, yet he had to tell it for it was the truth and what greater purpose was there in truth, if not by giving it.

The sun had still been there when Oswald met up with his chosen few. Six times three were called for, but only eleven had made it alive. As Oswald looked around him he saw familiar faces, but also new ones. The first to Greet him was Theodoric, later named the Forgiving, a Batavii warrior send to aid Oswald in any way he could. There was Una of the Menapa tribe and in her company she brought Finn, the bard and Arlana, a woman clearly tuned to the World of the forest and everything in it. Then he saw Donora of the Nervii and Covis of the Dead heart, whose face looked more diminished since last they had met. A third member of the Nervii clan presented herself as Cathumanda, a female warrior, eagerly searching for what fame she could find. Then three Frisii arrived. Tjerk, named the Giant and his brother Oddert, grandsons of Dauwe. Then there was Jitske, one of the three Frisii maides who had accepted the gift of Sashura, a Fey which came to Gall Heim, disguised as three young maidens. Jitske had travelled with the two brothers to aid Oswald in the quest to come. Last there was Skalla Grimr, an old veteran Norse with only one eye, but all the strength one would look for in a Norse. After introductions a Morini scout named Kup, came forth and offered his scouting skills to Oswald King of the Usipeti. Still warm with the sun on their backs they began travelling west, towards the lands of the Semnoness and with every step they felt the sun losing some of its warmth. The danger of this quest was well known and though none spoke of it, they all knew how important it was to succeed. Hope was a rare gif these days and for anything in the world they hoped that the Valeda would give it to them in plenty.

Before they crossed the unseen borders of Semnoness territory, a few Menapa offered some of the group a blessing, just as they had done before the ravens watch quest. All but the two male Frisii were asked to join in their blessing. Even Jitske was invited, as the Menapa had seemingly concluded that a Frisii woman was more sensitive to their ways, as the males could ever be. After the joining the chosen geared up and wanted to walk away, when suddenly Kup, the Morini scout spoke up to the king asking to be given word. When Oswald gave it, the Morini scout told the party that he felt honor-bound to tell them that this journey was extremely dangerous and that he felt certain, he was bringing them to their doom. He told King Oswald that his journey here was known to his enemies and that they would be waiting for him. Oswald and the chosen thanked him for his honesty and told him that they still had to go. They were just as honour bound as he was and that their quest was one of hope. Hope for not only them, but for all the banner-men of King Oswald and thus they began walking, closer and closer to the borders of the Semnoness and their terrifying Shamans.





After crossing the border they soon began to see large numbers of Semnoness until suddenly their path towards the Valeda was blocked by a circle of aggressive fighters ready to charge forwards. A few words were spoken, but none from either side thought them heavy enough to take heat. Covis of the dead heart stepped forward and began to speak with powerful words commanding them to step down, but the odds were too much in favour of the Semnoness. The outcome of the battle was too important and suddenly the Semnoness charged. With brutal determination the warriors of the Semnoness launched themselves on the shields of the chosen. Left and right spears were stabbed, axes crushed and screams filled the darkening skies. Wyrd was wielded and thrown as mighty javelins against the still charging Semnoness warriors. As blood filled the pools around the chosen the cries of death tried to bring down the skies upon them, but skill and heroic deeds were not easily bested and when the last cries faded in the forest, the party realized that not one of them had died.

After moments of silence the sounds of more incoming Semnoness began reaching the ears of the chosen and with haste they continued their path towards the Valeda. From every side the Semnoness warriors, fuelled with hatred charged at the party, who were still moving forwards, but had to stop now and then to care for their injured. After a long road of fighting they finally arrived by a pool that was said to be a place of worship. Kup told them that the place was dedicated to Napaii, a Fey with vengeful appetites. After a short time of rest the party went on while the day slowly gave way to the coming night. Rain began to fall, as did the minds of the wyrds users amongst the chosen. The cursed grip of wyrd was slowly grasping the hearts of those who would use or wield the wyrd. At a crossroad the chosen looked at their King. There were two ways to follow. One direction was further through Semnoness territory, but the other direction was bolder. As it was a road going through Aryan territory. The Aryans, terrors in the night with their strange and horrific masks, were not yet seen. But their infamy had already spread amongst the lands and Oswald, King of the Usipeti thought it wise not to enter. After some more skirmished attacks by the Semnoness they finally arrived at a small encampment. Here they were welcomed by the maidens of the Valeda. Now it was simply waiting for the words to be spoken and then to return home.

Ethna, oldest of the Valeda maidens, greeted the King and his chosen and gave hospitality. The group entered the small encampment and watched with eager eyes to glimpse at the Valeda. But the Valeda was lying on a bed, still exhausted from the vision she had seen the day before. Besides Ethna there were four other maidens, who were named Afic, Rhonda, Vevila and Treva. All Bructerii women, whose sole purpose was to care for the Valeda. Also present was Hakon inn Havi, a legendary Sicambrii warrior, who stood one foot taller than the tallest member of the chosen of Oswald. Then there were more Bructerii; two Shamans and a few guards. Last there were two Atribatii women who had come on their own accord, hoping to hear visions that could save their people. When asked they told that one out of three Atribatii was slain by a terrible disease that was stalking their lands. Their priests, ovates and healers did what they could, but every time they succeeded the disease struck somewhere else. It was almost as if the Gods themselves had cursed them for some, unknown deed they had committed. It was a sad thing to behold and more than one chosen felt his heart chill when hearing their tale. Oswald heard that the Valeda could do only one vision a day, for more would kill her, as the wyrd needed for such a feat, was more a mortal woman could handle.





Strangely though the Atribatii were asked to come forward and hear a vision concerning their fate. The vision they received told them this: "Your people will be saved, when the cauldron-born are recognized". The doom in these words was so heavy that few were able to wish them good luck when they journeyed home. Now it was time for Oswald, but he already knew that the Veleda could not muster a second vision and thus the chosen agreed on waiting and settled down for a meal and some good conversation. When the sun was almost set Covis stood up and said he would go to a shrine to fulfil an oath he had given to the Fey who healed him on the quest to the Atuatucii lands. This he had to do today between day and night, as the gift was given by a creature that lived between those places. A small group went with him, only to find the Menapa of the group already there. Covis wanted a dual in which he could prove that his words were right and the words of the Menapa were wrong, but after a small battle of words and wits, he agreed on respecting this Fey and as such fulfilling his Oath. It was clear to all that Covis was battling the darkness of wyrd and as such the issue was laid aside for better and foremost, more daylight times. While the whole discussion was going on, the warriors had their hands full of battling Semnoness who were still surrounding the area. When the last Semnoness died, they returned, hoping the encampment of the Veleda was reason enough for the Semnoness to not attack them.

After a meal, Oswald was called to the Veleda. She told him that she would see his vision, because it was very important to do so. If she would not see his vision it would fade in the shadows of the ever moving streams of wyrd. The maidens plead her not to do it, yet she said that she already knew she was going to die. In one of her first visions she had seen her own death at the hands of a King, named Oswald. Then, she knew not who he was, but now she did and could no longer refuse his vision. Oswald agreed and the maidens began to prepare. While the maidens stared preparing the ritual, the Druid Araturix entered the encampment. His visit was no coincidence, as the ways of Druids never are. He came to instruct Oswald and his chosen to prepare for a festival. This festival would be held after winter on a place where four clans were at war and were an old face was seen in a tree. The festival would be held to honour the gods. Araturix made it very clear that this festival was needed in order to secure the Gods presence in the lands of Tir Nan Beo. While this was going on, screams were heard from far away. Soon a group of people came rushing in the camp their faces coloured white in shock. While they were fetching the water needed for the coming vision they encountered a full grown swamp-troll. If the Veleda was to speak again, this Troll had to be taken care off as the water was needed. The Chosen mustered their warriors and went after the troll, but this creature was no small foe. His arms were as long as children and his eyes blazed bright with anger. The claws of the Troll were twice as big as a human and the stench he produced could be smelled from far away. His feet drove deep into the mud when he charged left and right to the on-going warriors who tried to kill it. It was a battle worthy of song, with in the end a dead troll and lots of armour shattered. Now the maidens could collect the water and began to mix the herbs. After some time the ritual was ready and all could see the tears in their eyes when they went into the tent to collect their beloved Veleda.





The Valeda was taken outside, so all could see and hear what she had to say. The smell of herbs filled the air and the maidens began to sing their wyrd entwined songs. The Valeda trembled on her feet clearly intoxicated by the powers now roaming in her body. She screamed, yelled, took hold of one of her Shamans and then everything changed. Around the chosen mist began to gather. Trails of white fog danced around their eyes while they could do nothing but stair into the wyrd that filled the enclosed encampment. Then suddenly figures appeared. At first as playing shadows cast by the fire of the campfire. But with every moment the shadows were coming closer and more real. All those gathered witnessed the coming of something powerful, but could do nothing to influence it. It was as if their lives were frozen in time and all around them the world was chasing forth visions of what the future could hold for them. Within this mass build-up of power the tears of the Valeda fell down as rain, touching each and everybody on their faces. It was a moment of both horror and clarity and for a short moment they all could see in what world the Valeda truly lived.

Then, out of the shadows, figures began to move in the encampment. They saw Rhonda coming out of the tent of the Valeda, her hands against her head while she screamed: "the Valeda is dead!". Then suddenly a drunken man appeared and after him came a vision of a girl, kneeling by water. She looked around and spoke of voices. Not one of them understood, but the imminent feeling emerged that this girl was important. Then the girl stood up and Semnoness appeared. She ran in the shadows of the mist and the Semnoness followed her there. Then a cauldron-born appeared and walked past the chosen giving chills over their bodies as she nearly touched them. After that Semnoness warriors appeared pointing to an unknown position in the mist. They stood there and watched with hateful eyes. Then he suddenly screamed: "Oswald...death is upon you!", and then disappeared into the mist. The mist started to unravel, but just before it was gone, Kup appeared mumbling words none could understand. He tilted his head and looked at the campfire as if he was looking at the ground. "His name is the unfading", he whispered and in that name lay hidden a terrifying power, that none could understand, or none would care to share. The mist faded in the winds, the rain fell as if nothing had ever happened and all of them looked at the lifeless body of the Valeda and the dead Shaman she had killed in her dying breath. The horror of the site was enough to bring tears in anyone's eyes. The chill of its passing still froze each of their hearts. Then suddenly Rhonda appeared her hands against her head. "The Valeda is dead!" She screamed it out and from that moment on they understood that what they had witnessed in the vision had been a small grasp of the near future, connecting with all of them. It foretold a grim future; with threats towards their king and a cauldron-born in the mist. All looked at each other knowing that Oswald had still not been given the vision, he had been called for and even worse, they knew that dangers were still at large and to come.





Everything had gone mad. The Valeda was no longer alive and one of the Shamans had died along with her. Without a Valeda the quest had fallen to ruin and all hope had crumbled underneath it. Was it all too late? And how is a new Valeda be found? The answer came quickly when the chosen were told that the bloodline of the Valeda was one of Divine origin and that somewhere, right then, a new girl had been given the blessing of foresight. This girl had started walking the moment the Valeda had died. The only thing they had to do was to find her. "The girl", someone spoke, "the girl from the vision. Could she be the new Valeda?" The group was split and one was set on a task to find the girl, the girl in the vision who kneeled by the pool of water. Where was this pool? someone asked and all of a sudden the remembered the pool on their journey, so they took on their search towards the pool. At the same moment the last remaining Shaman asked if a few warriors could search for the last remaining shaman of the group. He had gone into the forest, and he was now much needed to assist the shaman in his coming task. A group of chosen went into the darkness of the forest, knowing the full danger it presented. Semnoness were still in large numbers close by and thus in the dark they dared not to take light with them. The first group encountered the maiden by the pool and fought of the Semnoness hunting her. When they looked at her in the dark they found the same scared girl they had seen in the vision. Even the Semnoness hunters were the same. Some could not escape the thought of the Semnoness that screamed to Oswald. "Death is upon you!" they had screamed. Was it the death of Oswald that would follow? And when would this fight take place? They quickly travelled back to the camp where the maidens embraced the scary girl and tried to calm her. The new Valeda trembled and tears fell down her white coloured face. Some of the chosen spoke against the idea that she would become the new Valeda. Saying that it was against her will, but what did they know? How could she refuse the gift that was bestowed upon her? A gift that secured the lives of her people. She would see every enemy that would strike against the Bructerii. Would watch every face whose intentions against them were violent. She was the shield her people needed, there power in a world of curses. How could she refuse when the blood of a God was now mixed with the blood of her own?

Back in the forest the chosen tried to find a Shaman whose hero belt was decorated with a massive boar. In the darkness of the night every tree looked at them, every sound was one of potential danger. Then, suddenly, white faces emerged from the darkness. A small group of Aryans charged without warning. Their knives and spears stabbing anywhere they could. Their sickles slashing through the air, violently hacking towards the chosen that could do nothing then defend themselves against the raining force of nightly powers. Strange sounds wept over the path, without any spoken word understood. After the first wave of attacks the chosen rallied their forces and began to attack themselves. Then, suddenly as it began, the Aryans lay dead on the ground. Their masks still on their faces and their intentions still unknown to all. Between the bodies the chosen found a shaman with a boar on his belt. He was dead. When they returned they found the rest of the people gathering on an open field. There the maidens stood around a bed of wood on which the dead Valeda was laid down. When all were gathered the maidens began to sing. A song of woe and heart-breaking memories. It was said that the new Valeda would receive the spirit of the previous Valeda, and in doing so the new Valeda would be installed. As long as the maidens kept singing, this moment of transfusion could take place. A moment in which, everyone looked at the bright flames erupting from a broken body; the previous Valeda was finally at peace. The skies wept with rain, yet the flames burned bright and the song travelled far. The chosen stood silently while watching this funeral. The wyrd was dancing in a song of flames entwining each memory in a blaze of power.





Then suddenly a scream was heard: "Oswald, death is upon you!" It was as if the Gods themselves had spoken. From the shadows outside the pyre's light Semnoness charged at the chosen. A mass of Semnoness armed with many weapons that had been waiting for the right moment, when the chosen would be weakened and that moment was now. The few fighters had to defend the maidens, the wyrd users and themselves. Wave after wave the Semnoness charged in the light of the burning Veleda. Their weapons flashing as the flames reflected upon their steel. The chosen fought as never before, trying to kill and defend all they could, but chosen were falling and chaos was everywhere. Between the fallen Jitske ran, helping where she could, healing against impossible odds. She felt her wyrd screaming through her veins when she battled against the wyrd of the night. Then the battle was over. Around the fire lay dead Semnoness and wounded chosen.

The song stopped, the flames diminished and the new Veleda cried. In front of her lay the body of Rhonda, one of the maidens of the Veleda. Her body desecrated by a Semnoness weapon. For a moment there was silence, but after that desolation. The spirit of the dead Veleda was gone and because Rhonda had stopped singing the transformation was lost. Eyes looked at each other, but for moments there were no thoughts. Everything seemed lost.

Within the remnants of the fire and the disillusion of fates the druid Araturix, having watched the battle from a distant, walked towards the fallen body of Donora of the Nervii. Something in his eyes had seen a change, or a fate waiting to happen, and there it was, lying on the ground. As he shouted to the skies he looked at Donora and the ring he had given her. A ring she was forbidden to loose. If so she had to drink the blood of Araturix himself. Few could begin to phantom what he did to her, but when she started breathing again her eyes looked different. The veil of the world had somehow fallen and Gods forbid what she was able to see. Those in the surrounding area heard the druid saying that she was now a blooddrinker. What he meant by it was anybody's guess, but those who saw Donora knew that he had changed her. The only question was if it was for better, or for worse.

The silence was again disturbed by sounds. First there were whispers speaking of the spirit world and after these words were spoken Skalla Grimr, the Norse Ovate, was summoned to ask if it were possible. After consideration a plan was formed. They all knew now what was at stake. Within the spirit world they had to find the old Veleda, hoping she would be willing to go back in a new host. Besides that the chosen knew that the Aryans they had encountered were no accidental encounters. They were drawn to wyrd and when they found it, they would try to destroy it. The Aryans were wyrd-slayers, though none knew why this was, or how they could resist its calling. The chosen looked at each other and made two separate groups. The King and his warriors would stay outside the spirit world and defend the gateway, supported by Jitske, who was needed if everything went wrong. The rest would step into the spirit world and hope for the best. Skalla Grimr would open the gate and would secure the pathway needed to go back. A simple plan made, simple in any piece of land, but not for the lands in Tir Nan Beo. Here, at nights, the wyrd is twisted, destructive and some say downright evil. There is a voice in the streams that all can hear. A voice of sadness; of malice and of darkness.





Skalla Grimr began to weave his words to open a pathway to a world of spirits. A place where the living were hunted down, where life was forbidden and hope was lost. His words spoke clearly and travelled with ease, touching the fabrics of the world he wanted to enter. Then, unseen, a gateway was forged. Mist was everywhere, but in the distance the chosen saw lights. Torch's held high by creatures long lost in this veil between places. Here were the once who could not travel further. Here wandered the cursed. First the party saw few spirits, but their living bodies echoed as wildfire around them. Their body heat sweet promises of escape. More and more spirits gathered begging for mercy, asking for help, promising anything. One by one the party fell apart by the ever growing crowd of the damned, wishing for redemption. Heartbreaking stories and eye opening words spoke of lives long lost and in that cruel place the party found the dead Veleda. They asked and asked, but she did not want to go back. She had lived a life in service and was not compelled to continue that service. The chosen asked and begged for her to return, but she was unwilling, until the maidens of the Veleda began to sing a song and the two Veleda's locked their eyes for the first time. A moment of recognition followed by something which most did not understand. Then suddenly the old Veleda was gone.

By the entrance of the gateway the chosen with Jitske stood silent in waiting. The gateway Skalla Grimr had opened stood open, letting two worlds collide. The power coming from it would be felt from a far distance and in these distance there were Aryans. First they saw white faces in the dark and then the horrors were upon them. The Aryans launched themselves on the shields of the chosen with such ferocity that the chosen had a hard time not falling down. With their silent rage they came from all directions, lashing forward with such determination as to wonder what events had made them such wyrd haters. More and more fought the chosen that battled with their last reserves, hoping that the others would return soon, in the hope that the gateway would be closed. But the gateway stayed open. And from every side the Aryans jumped from the shadows into the chosen's midst, hacking their weapons as hard as they could. Shields began to shatter, armour was hacked to pieces, faces covered in blood, but still the Aryans came, hurling themselves over their dead clan members. When the first returned from the spirit world an Aryan dove straight to Jitske. Her wyrd powers served as beacons in the night. She fell to the ground while the rest moved to rescue her. More and more members returned through the gateway, their faces grim and tired. Expressions of darkness and woe marked in their eyes. Only Covis of the dead heart did not return. All heard Donora speaking to him, but Covis could not enter the world of the living, there was something wrong. Then he was gone, ripped from sight into the mists of the spirit world. Aryans still attacked the party with such aggressive power that the warriors began to weaver. They had fought all day long and their bodies were beginning to surrender. Wave after wave the white horrors jumped in front of their shields slashing at their faces, hoping to kill them all. Then all of a sudden Covis was back and Skalla Grimr closed the gateway. Followed was quietness. As all looked into the darkness the white faces were gone. The terror was over.





Back in the encampment everyone looked at each other hoping to find answers of what the day had brought them, but in their eyes they saw the same questions they had and sometimes even greater problems. The scared girl was taken away to be prepared for her first vision. A vision of great power, the remaining Shaman said, for every first vision of a new Veleda is more powerful as the ones thereafter. The chosen sat around the fire of the camp when Hakon inn Havi, the Sicambrii giant who had fought besides the chosen all day long, stood up and walked towards King Oswald. He began to speak of visions and questions of riddles in his lands and Formorians on their borders. He was send by his King, King Olaf Hoornbreaker. A mighty King who ruled over all the Sicambrii. In the past the Sicambrii had taken an oath to protect the lands of Tir Nan Beo from the menace that lived beyond their borders. They have holdup to their oath for many generations, but since the death of Balor, less and less Formorians came to their lands. The King had send Hakon to find out what was happening, but the vision he received from the Veleda was one of riddles and other clans. He would encounter a group of many different clans, fighting for the same goals and these clans would unravel the mystery of his lands. He had waited for more than fifteen moons hoping for this group to arrive and now this had happened. Oswald, King of the Usipetii agreed to give aid and as such a new quest had already presented itself, before the present one was good and over. A group of chosen would enter the Sicambrii lands and go deep into Formorian territory. There they would unravel the mystery of the diminishing Formorians and with the help of the Gods find their way back again. It was a feat none had ever dared, outlived and only those brave enough were able to survive such challenge.

After this some of the chosen spoke up to the maidens of the Veleda. They were Theodoric of the Batavii, Finn, the Bard of the Menapa Menapii and Oswald king of the Usipetii. They spoke of dishonour and failing hospitality. They had felt disrespected by the treatment of the maidens and wanted justice. Araturix, still present, asked Theodoric if he wanted blood, as was his right, but Theodoric declined. Because of this Araturix gave him the Bardic name "the forgiving" and looked at Oswald for his answer. Oswald wanted blood and a champion of the Bructerii was summoned to fight. Oswald appointed his champion in the form of Theodoric the Forgiving, warrior of the Batavii clan, who accepted with honour. He was given the sword named Cascarach to wield for this one dual. Who, once drawn, had to taste blood. King Oswald had been given the sword by the late Ard-Ri and named it after him in honor of his deeds. Before the dual was fought however, Oswald wanted to hear the vision of the Veleda as the thought of blood before the vision was thought to be ill luck. So the Veleda was asked to speak first her foretelling. The song of the maidens began to fill the air. A song of sadness and of regret, of malice and servitude, of hope and power. All words danced around the campfire touching all who could hear them. The wyrd trembled around the new Veleda as it gathered all sights hidden deep within its currents.

Then the Veleda began to speak:

For Oswald she said: *"Every last banner man will someday betray you except those who have kneeled before you"*

For the Nervii she said: *"The late will inherit a dead man's wish"*

For the Frisii she said: *"When the heroin is embraced the Frissi lands will be saved"*

For the Tir Nan Beo Norse she said: *"When the honor of the Norse has grown enough, those in doubt will join the battle"*

For the Menapa she said: *"The whispers of your world will be as spears on the battlefield"*

And for the Batavii she said: *"The truth is in your midst"*





After the Batavii vision the Veleda fell down and was taken away. Then the champion of the Bructerii arrived. He was called Aron the Wilde, a champion of the Bructerii and a man of famed skills. The battle commenced in which Theodoric draw first blood on Aron. When asked if it was enough, both man agreed that the blood had been spilled and honour was restored. Oswald, King of the Usipeti then walked forward and declared, with the druid Araturix as witness, that Theodoric the Forgiven, from that day on would be the voice of King Oswald in his absence. A great honour and responsibility. He then chose advisors to aid Theodoric before making decisions. First was summoned Skalla Grimr from the Tir Nan Beo Norse, who accepted gracefully, then he choose Una from the Menapa clan, Tjerk, named the Giant from the Frisii and last he chose Donora from the Nervii. After this he appointed Kelmomas the late, Prince of the Nervii, to be his champion, though the exiled prince of the Nervii was not there to accept this honour.

Then the fight was over and thoughts of the future returned to them. All looked at each other, but somehow few were able to speak. The vision had not given them answers; instead they were given riddles and wars. Yet there was hope in the words the Veleda had spoken. There was talk of truth, of honour and though she had not spoken of victories, she had not spoken of defeat either. Perhaps the visions the Veleda had seen were not clear enough, but were still soft. Soft enough to be bended, or even be reshaped. Perhaps the future was still full of events which could alter them all, though all knew the Veleda was always right. She had never spoken a word that did not come to pass. It was her power. The reason everyone left the Bructerii alone. It was one of the many wonders Tir Nan Beo hold close. The group sat down and began to feel the weariness of the days they had travelled and fought. Finn, the Bard of the Menapa Menapii told stories and sang songs and when the night gave way to the morning they all went home. The weaving of words had not given them what they had hoped for, but it had to be enough for now. It simply had to be enough.

