

## The Legend of Ryder Swiftarrow

by Stuart Emmerman

“Not all those who wander are lost.”

He is known by many names, to the Elves of the Wildwillow he is Nim'ohtar. In the bowels of the Earth, the Dwarven clans call him Tarâg-un. However, to the people of Bristol he is known as Ryder Swiftarrow, a mysterious Ranger who most recently, with a band of other brave heroes, helped to defeat and destroy the evil dragon, Bloodtharken.

Some people claim that he was born among the Elves; others say that it wasn't until Ryder was a young man that he came to be in their company. Either way, it was there that he learned many of the skills that he has now mastered. Among them: tracking; communing with animals and nature; the power of runes and runic tablets; and even the elemental arts of Magic. Not much is known of the extent to his powers, however, it is said that Ryder can track a Unicorn in a blinding snowstorm, and then coax the great beast to let him upon its back. Only one who is completely in tune with the Earth and the magics of the world could achieve such a feat, and live to speak of it, (though Ryder never would.) He is both an expert marksman, and a skilled fighter. His bow was gifted to him by the Lady Nightmoon, Guardian of the Eastern Lands. For his aid in defending her people she gave to him the bow, Darodir, or Nighthawk. It is said to be crafted by the goddess herself and given to her high general always to be used in the defense of the ones who cannot defend themselves

The Nighthawk, however, is but one of the Ranger's weapons, he also possesses the sword of Kurguul, the Shaman King of the Orcs. The story goes that the Shaman King, called out to the very elements of the world, beseeching them to help him craft a weapon that would tear asunder all that would dare oppose him. Deep within the bowels of a fearsome volcano, the mighty Orc forged this devastating sword. Into it he imbued the power of fire, so that the blade would always burn through his enemies and smite them to the ground. He blessed the sword with the strength of the Earth so that it may be solid as stone and never break. He beckoned to the winds to grant the sword their speed and elegance, so that it will sing through the air while being virtually weightless. Finally, as he dipped the red hot blade into a pool of icy water, he said a prayer and asked the water to endow his weapon with its presence, so that the sword may move with the fluidity of the tides. When he was finished, the Shaman King held out the sword before him and named it Ara'nok - the Windfury.

How Ryder acquired this sword, however, is somewhat a mystery, some say that he took it from the corpse of the Shaman King, himself. Others say that Kurguul gave the weapon to Ryder as payback for saving the Orc's life. Either way, when asked about it, Ryder simply states that it had once belonged to someone that he holds in high regard and greatly respects.

All this, of course, brings up another enigma and that is Ryder's age. To believe some of the tales, Ryder is thought to be several hundred years old. The exploits of Lady Nightmoon and the Shaman King happened very long ago and by all accounts the Ranger known as Ryder Swiftarrow should be long dead and naught but a legend. However, each year he walks among the people of Bristol, stocking up on supplies and wares for the long winter ahead, and most recently aiding the travelers of the band of the Twisted Claw. Some claim that it cannot possibly

be him, but the elderly citizens all agree that the Ranger is the same man, unchanged from the days of their youth. He is most often seen travelling in the company of the Elf, Skylana Softbreeze. It was together that they defeated Bloodtharken and drank from beast's own heart. Now, with news of a new darkness arising in Bristol, Ryder and Skylana once again begin the trek north to aid their friends in the quelling of this new threat.