

## The Tale of Beldak the Brave

Beldak rode into the town with his head held high, his muscular body adorned with golden full plate armor and helmet. Despite the chill rain and bitter winds that were about him he bore no cloak, proud to show off the Sun insignia on his breastplate. Pulling back on the reigns of Glory, his milk white steed, Beldak stopped at an inn to find the man who'd summoned him to this town, if a man is what you'd call him. When he entered the inn he took a moment to look around and drink in his surroundings. The inn was the norm for a poor area such as this. The floor was covered in hay to soak up the water and mud that travelers brought in and the room had small rounded wooden tables at which the patrons gathered. Another look around showed him the man he was looking for... Master Ignis, one the Leaders of the Order of the Sun. There he sat with his skin the color of rich earth and his nut brown eyes... yet somehow the eyes had the faint glow of orange as if he was sitting next to a fireplace. In front of Ignis was a map of the local area. Master Ignis unsettled Beldak; something about his presence was just so very...present. It was as if he could engulf the room and leave nothing but ash. This shook him; Beldak did not like the prospect of talking to a Paragon, one of the elemental Guardians of Creation. Beldak walked up to him and bowed his head in respect.

"Master, you sent for me?" Beldak asked as he was becoming increasingly curious as to the vague evil mentioned in his summons to this town. "What is it that you would have me do?" "The Draco Disciples summoned something in the nearby Kingdom of Barrowstone last night," spoke Master Ignis, his voice deep and serious as he pointed to the map by the local king's castle. "I can't tell what it is they summoned, but I do know why the creature was summoned. They are attempting to supplant King Azor's rule by taking Princess Lanaria hostage. I need you to get the Princess back whilst I track down the Draco Disciples."

"Master," spoke Beldak nervously, "I am deeply honored that you would have chosen me..." "Yes, yes but we don't have time for pleasantries! Barrowstone needs you. GO!" Ignis yelled. One didn't question Master Ignis's orders, not if one wished to remain among the Order... or the living. Given this, Beldak quickly went out and remounted his horse and headed to castle of Barrowstone. When he approached the castle, Beldak noticed something very wrong; all the woods around the town had begun to wither. Why were the trees around this town dying? Was it the disciples? Whatever this creature the disciples summoned was it seemed that it was not only threatening the people but the very fabric of Nature. As Beldak rode onto the road to the castle he heard the voice of Ignis in his mind. "Farworth." What was that supposed to mean? Beldak wondered Ignis's intention as he neared the guards at the castle gates.

"Greetings soldier," said one of the guards. "Know you the password?"

The purpose for Ignis' words became clear and with a smile Beldak responded, "Farworth." The guard's eyebrow arched.

"Alright there sir," he said giving a confused cough. "I guess if you know the password, er, you can go in... I guess. Just mind the law whilst you are here."

The lands inside the castle were the example of righteous leadership. The lands were well tended and the people seemed well fed and content. King Azor kept his people well, that much was evident. As he rode his horse through the town an elderly peasant woman came up to him on the street speaking with a low country accent.

"'Ello there young fella!", the woman greeted, taking special notice of Beldak's sun symbol upon his chest "A knight of the Order of the Sun?! You're here about the Princess then 'ey? Terrible business I'm afraid, some creature came here in the night and took 'er it did! I about lost

my wits from fright!”

“Did you get a good look at what this creature was?” asked Beldak hoping to get a lead as to what he was up against.

“Nay, but I hear the King did! He’s holding a court session right now to figger out how to get her back! You look like a strong lad. Why don’t you go and see if you can be of some assistance to him!”

“I thank thee lass I shall indeed get myself to the King’s courtroom and offer him what assistance I can!”

Beldak rode fast to King Azor’s castle and entered the throne room where the king was in council with the elders and mages of the land.

“Your Majesty,” stated one of the mages. “Our magic cannot track Princess Lanaria’s location. ‘Twould take a power far beyond ours to simply find her, let alone the magic required to slay what manner of magical beast took her.”

“I already told you! I saw the beast that took her, ‘twas a dark hairy creature with the wings of demon!” shouted the King in frustration. “How can you, my most wise counsel, NOT know what took my daughter?! Is there no offers of help from any of you?”

“My Liege,” Beldak stated proudly reverencing the old man on the throne. “I, Beldak, offer you my sword to rescue Lanaria!”

“Beldak, I have heard much of thee, this is Order business then?”

“Master Ignis sent me himself,” said Beldak watching the room buzz with excitement at the Paragon’s name.

“Thou knowest the risks involved?” asked the king. His eyes focused on Beldak as if he was looking into him. “We do not know what exactly took the princess or why. In sooth, the beast could be anything from a troll to the devil himself and we’d be just as wise against it.”

“The creature that took your daughter was sent by the Draco Disciples.” spoke Beldak “They seek to unmake your kingdom.”

The court took in a collective gasp. Everyone in the court looked first to the king and then back to Beldak. One of the Mages was the first to speak. “And thou, Sir Knight, mean to go against the Disciple’s creature?”

“Sir, I live my life by the code and I will leave no innocent woman in danger,” answered Beldak. He then drew his sword and knelt down beside it in a knight’s reverence. “On my honor I will save Lanaria or, by God’s grace, die trying.”

The king had heard that once Beldak swore on his code no amount of persuasion could change him from his course... even if the course seemed impossible. King Azor was hopeful, but worried that the boy before him was too young and untested.

“Then go, Sir Knight, with my blessing,” said the King, though it grieved him sore to send this knight of the Sun out to his doom. “May God watch over thee in thine travels.”

Beldak left the castle astride Glory, his mind wondering desperately where Lanaria could have been taken. His reverie ended when he saw a beautiful young woman in a blue and white dress dancing atop the castle wall. Beldak didn’t know why, but he felt oddly comfortable around this woman. As he rode up he noticed her blue eyes, sky colored pools riddled with intelligence and ancient wisdom. Her elegant blond hair framed her face that bore a lovely smile. As he rode closer to her still Beldak could also hear her singing a strange haunting melody. As he passed her Beldak thought he heard her greet him but when he turned to speak with her, no one was there. The wind began to pick up as he looked at where the woman had been standing, swearing to himself he knew that woman from somewhere. He could even still hear her song in his mind. Or

was it being carried in the winds? Were the elements themselves aiding Beldak in his quest? “Never mind,” thought Beldak. “It is not important if the Paragons bless this quest. I have sworn to rescue Lanaria and I shall.”

So Beldak went with the winds gently pushing at his back. He noticed the winds began to die down as he reached a dark and dreary looking cave that emitted a most foul odor reminiscent of bad eggs. From within the caves depths, Beldak could have sworn he heard the weeping of a woman. As he approached the cave, Glory gave a great shudder and bucked high into the air refusing to enter the cavern ahead. Petting his mount farewell, Beldak went into the cave alone. The cave was wet and dark and soon he lost sight completely. Beldak fumbled for his Alchemical potion, given to him by the Order’s mages, and dumped it on his sword. It was a creation of the other Leader of the Order of the Sun, Aria, and rumored to assist with the problems of the dark. The potion smelt most sweet – like a mix between honey and roses. Once Beldak was satisfied that he had covered the entire sword, he struck his sword against the cave walls. Beldak shielded his eyes as the sword burst into brilliant white magical fire.

As he walked through the cave he soon happened upon the helpless form of Princess Lanaria. He carefully approached her. Before he could ask if she was well, a creature burst forth from the shadows into the light and revealed all its horrible glory. The monster stood at least 11 feet tall, a terrible creature that was like unto a bat and man with black leathery wings jutting from its shoulder blades. It stood hunched over as yellow drool came from beneath its sharp jagged teeth. Its bloated body was layered with muscle from its brown furry legs to its massive clawed arms as it stared at Beldak with raw hatred from its large, red insect-like eyes.

“Get thee hence, knight!” the beast hissed. “You know not the power I possess!”

“Nay, I shall not, vile beast,” shouted Beldak. “The Princess is not yours to claim. I will give thee one last chance to return the Princess and surrender lest I vanquish thee!”

“Fool! I am of the Umbralee,” the monster laughed. “Our race once dined upon yours as your kind now preys upon lambs! I shall make quick work of thee!”

Beldak had heard tales of the Umbralee. He’d thought them to be a myth, a child’s tale and nothing more. According to the myths the Umbralee were the reason most humans had an innate fear of the dark. These ancient creatures attacked from the shadows to use man for their meal leaving not but bone behind. They showed no mercy to man, woman, or child.

Nevertheless, Beldak lunged toward the beast. The Umbralee flapped its mighty wings but once and blew Beldak’s helmet clean off his head. As his helmet shattered upon the rocks Beldak’s long golden hair fell around him - crowning his head and framing furious blue eyes. The holy blade still in his hand, Beldak took the creature’s arm from its shoulder with a mighty swing of his blade. The creature’s eyes seethed with malign fury. The Umbralee wrapped its remaining clawed hand around Beldak’s throat. Beldak dropped his sword and tried to fight free from the fearsome creature’s grip. But he was no match for its brute strength. Beldak soon realized that he was running out of air and his vision was growing dark. He knew Death would not wait long and he heard the drums of the Danse Macabre start to beat for him.

“My Lord Ignis, I have failed you. I am sorry...” he thought in farewell.

The Umbralee howled in pain and dropped Beldak. From the back of the cave, Lanaria thought she saw the Umbralee’s hand smoking. She did see an orange glow fade from Beldak’s throat.

“What sorcery is this?!” screamed the Umbralee. “SHE told me the Paragon’s power would not reach past her spells!”

Beldak picked up his blade from the cave floor and walked toward the cowering beast.

“Who do you mean, She?” Beldak demanded. “Who is this woman? Who has summoned you?!”

“The Lady’s secrets are mine... to my dying breath, you pustule!” It wailed as it rounded toward the princess. “Her death... will make... the Lady so...very...HAPPY!”

The Umbralee’s smoking craws and fearsome maw dove toward Lanaria. Beldak threw his sword and with a snicker-snack the blade sheared the Umbralee’s head from its shoulders. Silence reigned in the cave.

“’Tis over then?” asked the Princess, her voice shaky with tears. “I thank thee sir knight! I feared my life would end in this terrible place but thou hast proven a warrior of true skill!” Lanaria tried to cover her relief and fear with a practiced regal demeanor.

“The darkness of this place has not passed yet your Highness.” Beldak removed some of the Umbralee’s fangs. The mages of the Order could use them for their spells.

“Wherefore wouldst thou say that, sir?” she asked.

“Glory is not here,” he responded flatly, looking around for his milk white steed.

“Thy meaning, sir knight?”

“My horse, Glory, will not tread into lands of Darkness. We should leave, your highness. The Umbralee is no more, yet evil has claimed this place.”

They left the cave to find a still frightened Glory waiting by the cave mouth. Beldak assisted Lanaria onto his steed and they rode hard to King Azor’s castle. When the people saw that their princess was safe they lined the streets and cheered our hero all the way to the throne room.

The king rose to tearfully embrace his daughter. Over her shoulder he addressed Beldak. “Thou hast rescued my daughter! Thou art truly worthy of thine title, Sir Beldak! I hereby grant thee with the title Beldak the Brave for thine act of heroism in the face of unknown danger!”

“I thank you, Your Majesty, you are too kind. But in sooth the danger is not yet over. I have rescued Princess Lanaria, but there are greater powers at stake, powers that threaten your very throne. Your life is still in danger from those who sent the beast. A woman was mentioned, perhaps a titled Lady. I know not who this woman is, but I shall not rest until I see her evil vanquished!”

“I understand,” the king’s voice came with a small smile. “A knight’s work is never done, much like God’s! Yet please, take this as a token of my undying gratitude!”

The king handed Beldak a small vial of the purest water he’d ever seem.

“This is wishing water – gathered from our most sacred stream. May it serve you or your kinsman well when the time comes.”

And so Beldak and Glory rode back home with the wishing water and the fangs of the Umbralee to await his next task when the great British Isles would need him again.

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Beldak’s adventures occurred long ago and his vial of wishing water has passed down through generations – along with several other relics that Beldak held dear. If the stories are true, then a hero will find them to vanquish evil once and for all. But those are simply stories.