

The Last Thoughts of a Lurikeen

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Staghorn Moonlancer of Percival

A Lurikeen lay crumpled on the earthen floor. His weapon had been taken from him and his armor had been stripped. He was in a dark cave, deep underground, and little light could reach him. There was one shaft, however, that came from the surface. A hole in the earth reached down through the stones to shed a meager portion of light upon the captive's face, and at last he opened his eyes. His vision was blurred at first and there was blood on his forehead, but he had his wits about him.

Just then, he heard a *cheep!* and he looked up the shaft towards the surface. A small bird had stuck its head into the hole, looking for a worm. Upon seeing the Lurikeen, the bird hopped down the small tunnel to reach him. The captive smiled.

“Ah! little bird, come hither and listen to my troubles. Yours may be the last face I ever see.

Ale has a way of causing men to take incredibly foolish oaths. It has been that way since the beverage was first invented, and is that way today. It was no different for me earlier when I sat in the pub in Tir na Nog, drinking with some buddies of mine. Some buddies they are! They think that just because I am a Lurikeen that they can play tricks on me, as if I somehow liked tricks or was more prone to trickery. ‘Well my good friends, perhaps if I were a Nightshade I may be so inclined, but I am a Hero, so watch what you say around me, or ye might get a face full of spear!’ That is what I should have said to them. But instead I sat there laughing in my drunken stupor.

You see, there had been rumor of strange sounds issuing from the abandoned silver mines in the old Silvermine Mountains, east of Howth. Such places are filled with the young members of our fair realm, hunting beasts and accepting quests, and any strange noise may sound frightening to the inexperienced as these younglings indeed are. But I once was riding north to Tir na Nog at night when I heard for myself the eerie

clamorings from across the water, and I tell you, they were not natural. It was of this experience that I was talking to my friends as we sat making merry, and they chided me.

‘Strange noises!’ they said with a laugh, as if anything I were to say should be funny. ‘And what did these strange noises sound like?’

‘Why, dey sounded lak bangins and whirrins and such, dey did,’ said I in my drunken state.

‘Bangings! Whirrings!’ said my friends and they laughed again. ‘You are making this up.’

‘I aint no make dem up!’ I said and stood atop my stool angrily, shaking my fist. ‘I hurd it, like I hurd anything dat can be hurd. It was load and plan as day, and cam cross da water,’ and here I made hand motions that meant absolutely nothing.

‘Did it scare you?’

‘No, it daint skeer me, I no get skeered.’

‘Then make a bet with us! You aren’t afraid of a bet are you?’

‘Whad I tell you, said I aint skeered nothing.’

‘Go find out what the sounds are, and if you come back, we will buy you a round of beer!’

You must understand that at this point of time, a round of beer sounded incredibly good, and was as tempting as if I had been offered the finest gold. So naturally I accepted the bargain and we set out immediately on horseback. I rode with a Firbolg friend of mine, and as we galloped over the rough road towards Howth I began to grow sober quite quickly. I cannot decide whether it was the cold night air that did this or the retched Firbolg stink that emanated from my companions hindquarters.

At any rate, when we alighted I was in no mood to continue on with the silly bargain, but I had given my word and my friends would hold me to it. We swam east across the lough to the valley and walked across the grass until we were at the feet of the Silvermine Mountains. The moon was out in all her glory and illuminated the leeward side of the mountains with her pale beams. The mountains looked as they always had, and I was reminiscent of when I was young and spent many days in this area, practicing my combat arts so that one day I could make a name for myself. The wind gently rustled through the few trees that dotted the grasses before us, but there were no other sounds.

‘So where are these sounds you said you heard?’ said my Firbolg friend in a very patronizing way.

‘I do not know. Maybe they left. It was days ago when I heard the noises, so perhaps whatever had made them has gone. Oh well, too bad I cannot complete the bet! Let’s go back and get more drinks.’

“No, we didn’t come out here for nothing!” said an Elf friend of mine. He thinks himself very wise indeed, being an Eldritch and all, and never shies away from an opportunity to lord his supposed magnificent cranium over our own. He grasped my shoulders and pushed me towards the mountains. ‘A bargain is a bargain, and you wouldn’t want to be thought of as a Lurikeen who couldn’t keep his word, now would you? But I suppose that doesn’t make much sense. Lurikeens aren’t very prone to being honest.’

‘Oh, blow it out your pointy ears,’ I said angrily. ‘Not all Lurikeens are the same. I am a Hero dammit, and my honor is my life. So do not impugn my honor!’

It was about then that we heard it – faint at first but coming inarguably from the Silver Mines; *bang! bang! bang!* The noise echoed throughout the whole valley. Then there was a buzzing sound, not like a bee but... well, how do I describe it? It sounded like magic, as magic sounds when it is being charged, but it had a metallic resonance too, and was loud, or rather, reverberated through the very stone beneath our feet and up through our spines. We shuddered then, and any traces of friendly insults and drunken jollies vanished.

‘Let’s... get back to Tir na Nog,’ said my Firbolg friend slowly.

‘Aye, that didn’t sound very natural,’ said my Elf friend, and the two of them turned to leave. But I remained where I stood.

‘Aren’t you coming?’ they asked, but I faced the mountains and shook my head.

‘I swore to find out what is making these noises, and so I shall.’ Without turning to see their expressions, I walked strait towards the mountains.

‘C... come now,” said my Elf friend. “We weren’t serious about you going up there. Now come back here so we can get drunk again!’

‘No one will hold you to an oath you took while drunk,’ said my Firbolg friend. ‘I do not like the sounds we just heard. Come back!’ but I did not respond. I was not going to be known as a Lurikeen who could not keep his word!

My friends called after me until they were out of earshot. They probably went back to Tir na Nog to finish off my own beer, knowing them. But they didn’t concern me at that moment. I looked up the side of the mountains. It was steep, but I knew my way to the mines. As I walked up the hillside I passed many creatures and even some bandits that would have posed problems for me in the past, but they saw the fire in my eyes and the strength of my spear and let me be. The strange sounds had died away as I began my climb, and I had forgotten them. I was solely focused upon my climb and getting to the mines.

When I at last arrived at the **silver mines**, I noticed something immediately. The Siabra had abandoned them long ago, but one of the mines had been reopened. Its dark mouth opened before me and taunted me, both beckoning and tempting me. Part of me wanted to stride in without fear and confront whatever evil might be within, while another part of me wanted to run back to Tir na Nog with some lie to explain away the sounds and make myself out to be heroic. But I knew better than to do that. I may be a tricky Lurikeen, but the code of the Hero meant more to me than my malicious nature.

And so I stepped into the mine. Fear tends to grab hold of one’s neck and strangle him while he remains within indecision, but once one steps forward with command of himself, fear shrieks and retreats into the darkness. And so it was for me. I was more terrified standing outside the mine than I was when I walked inside. It was merely what I thought it would be; dark, damp and cold. I crept along the passage with my hand against the wall. I could barely see, and the moonlight from the entrance behind me was quickly fading into blackness. Stones littered the ground and I had to walk slowly to avoid bruising my toes.

I heard it again. It was loud, like standing underneath a waterfall. I could not hear the banging, but only the buzzing sound, only from within the mine it did not sound like a buzzing. It sounded like an avalanche. It was very near now, or at least, much nearer than it had been. As I crept along the passage in the blackness I saw a faint red glow in the distance, and then the avalanche stopped. The passage turned left before me, and the light

came from there. I could now see the ground and the wall and no longer needed to guide myself with my hand, so I began to lightly run towards the firelight. I stopped, however, right where the passage turned the corner, for I heard a new sound. It was low and menacing, and tainted with an evil joy. It was a voice from the firelight:

*'Watch the Celts tremble in fear,
For their children's blood we spill.
The end of Hibernia is drawing near!*

*Very soon they all will hear,
The drums emerging from this hill.
Watch the Celts tremble in fear!*

*O! their deaths will be severe,
And the Trolls will have their fill.
The end of Hibernia is drawing near!*

*At last we Shar shall mock and sneer,
And laugh while watching the Norsemen kill.
Watch the Celts tremble in fear!*

*All their races will appear,
Like corpses lying cold and still.
The end of Hibernia is drawing near!*

*Our thirst for blood is quite sincere.
O! such terror we will instill!
Watch the Celts tremble in fear.
The end of Hibernia is drawing near.'*

I did indeed begin to tremble, but not out of fear. I gripped my spear and turned the corner with fire in my eyes and death upon my breath.

A Shar stood atop an uneven rock in the middle of a round, stone chamber. A flickering firelight emanated from a staff he held in his hand and he raised it. He pointed at the far rock wall and uttered something under his breath. Immediately I heard a familiar sound, and then the wall began to collapse, as if whatever bonds that had held the stone together had been broken. The wall crumbled into dust and loose stone, and revealed a chamber on the other side. The Shar cheered in an unknown language and began to leap about, but as he turned around he saw me. Either he was very surprised to see me or I looked particularly terrifying, for he jumped back with a cry. I believe I must have looked terrifying.

‘What are you doing here?’ the Shar hissed at me between clenched teeth. He raised his staff menacingly at me but I paid him no heed. I merely stood my ground with my spear ready and stared at him.

‘I heard your little chant,’ I said softly, but my voice dripped with hatred. The Shar looked at me wide-eyed for a moment but then cast his head upward and laughed.

‘All the better!’ he said mockingly. ‘So you Hibernians will know my little secret; I do not care! Today is the day of the Shar. Once the Shar see what I have done for them and the new alliances I have made, they will thank me and praise me, and I will become king of the Shar, and we shall rule this land; hah! And you are too late little Hero to do anything to stop me. Look!’ He pointed behind him to the opening in the wall he had made. Lights flickered in the darkness therein and I heard muffled voices.

‘The Dwarves have delved deeply from their side to here, but needed me to show them the opening. Today is the day! The time had been set long ago. The Trolls are coming, my dear Lurikeen, so you had best be on your way!’ I saw large shadows and they were growing even larger, but I did not care. I was livid with anger. Typical of a Lurikeen to throw himself heedlessly into a fight, but what could I do? He made me mad.

I lunged at the Shar with my spear pointed at his heart, but the creature shrieked and brought his staff down. I felt a sharp pain in my head and suddenly all the fear that I had cast aside when I entered the mines came rushing upon me in a wave. He no longer looked like a measly little Shar but like a fearsome demon of unimaginable horror. I

stood cold in my steps and could not move. I was terrified, and it wasn't even a reasonable terror. The Shar smirked at me and then laughed, and raised his hands high to cast a spell on me. But I was a stubborn Lurikeen. So what if he was a demon of unimaginable horror? And right there I took away Fear's only weapon. Belittle even that which ought rightly be feared, and cowardice will find no place to reside within.

Before the Shar could cast another spell on me, I broke free of his hold and fell upon him like rain upon fire. His concentration was broken and he ran from me, no longer in the guise of a demon but yet again in that of a measly Shar. And for all his prowess as a spell-caster and earth-mover, he could not even defend himself. I gutted the brute, the tip of my spear showing him the true meaning of fear. I thrust into him and lifted him up, and he slid down the length of my spear, shrieking in agony until he could no longer move. Truly a traitor's death.

I was so overcome with my hatred for this thing that I did not see the Trolls arrive until it was too late. They cried aloud when they saw the Shar impaled on my spear, and lunged at me. I cast the corpse aside and threw myself into the horde of Trolls with an instinctive battle yell. I killed one, a staff wielding Troll that had tried to cast something on me, but as I searched for a new target I was overborne by the sheer numbers of Trolls. The dark, rough faces growled and towered far above me. A hand covered my face, and I felt a sharp twinge of pain before blacking out.

That is all I remember. Now, little bird, go! Leave! Warn the druids of what is to come. I cannot get out; I will die here. But perhaps with my death the realm might be saved. And no one will be able to say that I was a coward!"

The bird hopped up the shaft until it reached the surface and flew away. The Lurikeen sighed and looked around him. He was enclosed on all sides by earth except for a tunnel before him, but it was blocked by a large rock. The shaft above was barely large enough for the bird to fit through; there was no way out.

At length, the captive heard footsteps: *thud! thud! thud!* then *creak!* and the stone was removed. The captive merely saw the shadow of a large being standing before him. 'Whatever torture they inflict upon me,' he thought, 'I'll make their job hell.'

“Mmm, is dat a Lurikeen?” said a deep and husky voice from the opening, and the owner stepped inside the small earthen chamber. The rock was rolled back in place behind him and all went dark.

“I never ate a Lurikeen before.”