

A Minstrels tale - Ferran of the Quest

Contributed by Sir Arthur Ferran
Friday, 02 June 2006
Last Updated Monday, 07 April 2008

--This is the first piece I ever wrote in a Fantasy setting, so do not judge it too hard.--

Ferran of the Quest, is a tale about the young knight Ferran.

The story changes between the Minstrel Jean-Luc as he tells the tale, and the events as they unfold for Ferran himself.

All in all it is about 14 pages long.

--Bear with me, my first attempt of a Fantasy Tale. Feel free to drop a line or two of what to do better, and what sucked.--

The air was thick with smoke from pipe wielding elder men, the scent of sweat and the roar of the occupants in the tavern. Jean-Luc finished the melody of Damsel Elise and the dragon, and as an award, he received some clapping hands and cheering by the tavern's patrons. Free food, wine and lodgings were his payment for entertaining the Raging boar's occupants for the night, and desperate for food he had agreed.

Jean-Luc reached over for his goblet of wine and placed it to his lips to refresh himself, before he plucked a few of the cords on his lute and looked out over the gathering of patrons. The tavern filled to its brim, with the best of what Bretonnia could offer. All from serving wenches to the off duty soldiers of the keep nearby. The light from the fireplace and the two large chandeliers hanging from the roof in thick dark chains illuminated the tavern, and its light played over the five round sturdy oak tables, by which the patrons sat and savoured their wine and food. The serving maid tending to the men at arms by the long table met his gaze for a moment and it spoke of the pleasures the night would bring if he did his job well.

"Fellow citizens, my brethren and servants of the king... Ohh proud people of Breton, let me tell the tale of Sir Ferran of the Quest."

As he spoke, his fingers carefully worked the strings of the lute to accompany each word to start up the melody. Like magic did the soar die down as most of the patrons turned their attention to the minstrel.

A man of Breton, hair so dark and eyes so blue.

Serving his Kingship, and Lady so true.

Young Sir Ferran, clad in armour a knight.

Brought the enemies, of our lord to flight.

The mist lay thick over the fields upon which the battle would take place if his visions had been true. The same fields that the local peasants worked during the day hours, to provide food for the realm, but now they lay silent as the grave, abandoned. Sir Ferran glanced up towards the sky and sighed deeply, as he noticed the dark shapes of ravens circling in the sky waiting for a meal to serve itself. The dark clouds seemed to press down over the lands obscuring the light from the evening sky.

“Dark tidings, yes the enemy is out there. Maurice, make certain that Lady Lucille is well.”

Ferran offered a glance at the knight by his side, a nod offered in return as Sir Maurice turned his steed to return to the ranks and see to the lady. Yes it was truly a bad omen, not only did carrion birds circle the sky but the thick mist were nothing but natural. He turned his own steed and rode back towards the contingent of knights and archers.

Before him stood the two lances of knights, dressed in their heavy armour. The green and yellow tunic, showed their allegiance to Lord Bernard Ferran of L’Anguille. They were his fathers finest and served his command during this quest. Spread out the knights were the ragtag peasants he had brought with him to hunt, and utilize their bows in battles. As he let his gaze wander over them, he felt their expectations. After all, he was the commander and Lady Lucille was his to protect.

As he thought of the mission at hand, and the fair Lady Lucille, a horse rode up beside him. He did not have to look to know that the Lady had presented herself. She wore a silk dress as green as the finest grape, and her entrancing blue eyes, like the deepest parts of the sea of claws. She reached over and placed a hand on his shoulder plate, showing her faith in him and then she brought her horse back to show the men that he was the one in charge.

“Men of Breton...The Lady Lucille’s safety is passed on to us. We have brought her safe from L’Anguille, and we will see her safe all the way to Bordeleaux.”

He gestured over towards the south with his armour-encased hand. “There is a host of enemies of the King, our lands and all we stand for. A host that is determined to stop us from bringing Lady Lucille safe to Bordeleaux, a host that will stop for nothing to bring death onto the people of Bretonnia.”

Ferran paused for a moment as he looked out over the knights under his command. He could see the determination and the heroism of Breton’s militant and chivalric knights. Lady Lucille carried an aura of the land itself around her. In the eyes of the bowmen he saw fear but knew that they would take comfort in having knights with them once the battle started, they did not have much. Nevertheless, they had their own creed and honour, one he only knew by name; they called it the peasants vow.

“Lady Lucille, you ride with me and my lance. Maurice, I want your lance on my left, and you proud servants of Breton, you follow on the right wing. Bows on your strings, I expect you to ensure you keep the vow of peasants, remain strong and know we knights will not fail in our task.”

With those words, he turned his horse once again, and four other knights gathered up around him, and Lady Lucille who rode just behind him. Ferran glanced over to his right and issued a nod towards his fellow Sir Knight Maurice and his lance now at the ready. The second glance to the left, assured him that the throng of archers were ready to follow towards the enemy that blocked their path. Then as one the patrol began to move, slowly making their way forth deeper into the mist.

The words of the tale came naturally, as Jean-Luc carefully struck each cord in tune to the song. All the while, his eyes travelled over the gathering, as he tried to get a feel of the atmosphere. All tales could change ever so slightly to fit the current mood of the audience. The Men-at-arms listened with a look of remembrance of battles past in their eyes, the peasants always eager to hear tales of heroism and knights listened like children to his words. The wenches seemed to spend more time looking at him and dreaming of what to come. Once again, did he offer himself a proud smile, he knew he did his work well and he hoped that the Lady would approve of his telling of her heroes.

It did seem that the poetic song told were a given success tonight, for all listened, all but one.

Jean-Luc’s eyes focused on that lone hooded figure who sat near the fireplace at the far end of the tavern. The

minstrel's sharp eyes for details quickly picked out the small things, like the untended goblet of wine on the strangers table, the large sword and its intricate design of its scabbard. The glimmer of chain mail under his hooded cloak and the armoured gauntlets that covered his hands, truth be told Jean-Luc could not see a single piece of skin on the figure, nor make out any details of the mans face.

"Any losses Maurice?" Ferran asked as he looked out over the battlefield. The mist had dispersed, to reveal the remains of the vineyards, now filled with those whom had fallen. Beyond lay the burned down remains of Ville de raisin, now as dead as the enemy host he had just defeated. With a glance down at the withered carcasses of the fallen foe, he realized from where the necromancer had gathered his troops. Now the villagers would have peace at least. The archers wandered around, searching for anything valuable, and even if this alone was to ensure the future for themselves and their families, the act itself brought a frown upon Sir Ferrans face.

"We lost Louie DeCastone and Jean DeGuile. Vile magic withered the flesh from their bones. No armour could have saved them my lord." The fellow knight explained as he stood before Ferran and Lady Lucille. Ferran sighed deeply and gave a slight nod towards Maurice; he had known the man for ten years now and knew that the loss of two members of his lance would be hard on the man especially the loss of, young Jean, his brother. Once again, his attention drifted out over the battlefield to count the archers, it was common praxis only to count the dear knights after a battle. Once he was satisfied that none of his own archers had died in the skirmish, he spared himself a moment to look back and learn from what had transpired.

Back from the grave the enemy stood.

A howl that caused fear emerged from the wood.

Acting as one, the knights they rode forth.

Lances down, as they charged from the north.

Peasants, alone fired their bows.

Upon the fell bats to save them from blows.

From the woods the howl of the Wight.

Brought down one of our beloved Sir Knight

Swinging their blades to save their kin.

The Lady herself ensured them to win.

The undead had blocked the road, a host of thirty Zombies at least a dozen ghouls lead by a dark Necromancer. Ferran had ordered both lances to charge, just as dark magic engulfed two of the knights in Maurice's lance formation. Their screams ended as fast as they had begun and both knights and their steeds turned into piles of ashes within seconds. Moments later Lady Lucille called for the powers of the lands, and a howl of wind engulfed the knights as they charged forth into the ranks of the enemy.

As Ferran discarded his lance to draw his sword did he see the Wight emerge from the woods on right and move towards Maurice and his knights. He cut the head from the shoulders of a nearby Zombie as he spared himself a glance towards Lady Lucille behind him, and the peasants off to the left.

Never before had he felt pride for the lesser caste, but he felt it now as he saw the throng of archers sent volley after volley into the fell bats sent towards them. At least two dozens of foul beasts meet their final death by the peasant's arrows.

He just managed to block a sword aimed towards him, and felt the discharge of magic as the blade struck his shield. His eyes moved towards the attacker and felt a moment of fear as he looked into the eyes of the Necromancer. 'I am with you young knight. Feel no fear and lend me your sword.' The enchanting voice of a woman sung in his mind, and the fear washed away. He bellowed out for the Lady as he began to exchange blows with the dark magician, and with each blow did he feel himself growing stronger. The Lady of the Lake was truly with him this battle, it was as if he knew where the enemy would attack and was always a step ahead.

Then with a final stroke did his blade cut through the sword of his enemy, shattering it in a thousand pieces, before his blade cut the magician in two. The scream that followed with the dying breath of the Necromancer, showed all over the field as its restless dead servants began to crumble. In addition, with the Wight dead, Sir Maurice finished off the few remaining Ghouls without much trouble.

After having told the tale of the battle against the foul Necromancer, Jean-Luc paused once again to moisten his lips with a mouthful of the full wine in his goblet. A few of the peasants in the tavern moaned and begged him to continue the story, to tell what happened to the young Knight Ferran.

Sitting on his chair, upon a small stage in the corner of the tavern, the minstrel gave a slight nod of his head, which in turn made the begging die down. 'Be still my brothers, the night is young and there is far more to this tale to tell.' he said as he lifted his trusted old lute back into position.

One of the serving maids, ventured over towards him and filled his goblet with more wine, and offered a soft warm lustful smile before she coyly turned to tend the rest of the crowd.

The smell of honey-drenched boar roasting over the fire, the tobacco brought in from across the sea, along with sweat slowly became annoying to the Minstrel where he sat. He could imagine the burning gaze towards him from the cloaked man in the corner. "Oh blessed Lady, what scorn have I earned to suffer this" He thought for himself as he struck the first cord of his lute once again, to begin anew the tale of the young knight.

"And to Bordeleoux the lady he brought.

Through his journey five battles they fought.

By his deep desire to find the grail.<

Through visions of the Lady, he would find his trail.

Across oceans, to faraway lands.

Under burning sun, and dunes of sand.

Fighting, through the countless dead.

His retinue, for Breton they bled.

The sun glaring down upon the host of men, were costly. As far as they eye could see there were only dunes of sand, followed by more dunes. Ferran glanced around upon the small army that followed under his command and sighed deeply. Most of the knights hunched over in their saddles, it was hot like a blacksmiths furnace under the sun, and wearing a suit of armour did not ease the travels. Four knights stationed to protect the wagons carrying water and food. He pitied the foot soldiers, which due to the heat, now carried their spears and shields, less gracefully then a drunken Tilean pikeman, but their families back home depended on their loyalty to their lord. His own lips were dry and started to crack, and if it were not for old Guiseppie's advice to suckle on a coin to keep the saliva flowing most surely this hell would have been worse. The only living thing in sight was the circling vultures in the clear blue sky, or the poisonous black carapace crab like beings that hurried over the sand.

He knew that some of the men under his command, had started to despair, and he could overhear, during night camp, how even some of the younger knights had begun to question the reason behind the Quest to these forsaken lands. A gust of wind stirred the uppermost layer of sand, yet the wind gave no comfort, as it was as warm as everything else was. Thoughts of why the Lady had sent him here, started to form in his head, as the sounds of a horse approaching fast broke the silence.

“We found the ruins my lord. We have found the resting place of Sir Montard.” The two knights that were to scout ahead called out as they returned. The news caused a stir among the men. The two knights gave a quick layout of the lands and explained how a feel of death lay around the ruins. How the battle hardened steeds they rode had fought against moving forth, and deeper into the ruins.

“Knights of Breton! Soldiers! Prepare, we are at our end. This one final battle and the prize is ours. By the Lady, we will bring Sir Montard and the sacred blade ‘Du Lac to its resting place back home!”

At once, the people seemed to become alive once again. Most drank deeply, as the knights handed out water, but a few took a moment to get something to eat before the fight to get their strength back. Within long, they were back in ranks as Sir Ferran slowly rode along the groupings to inspect them and issue a few words to bolster the morale. As he rode he felt a pride over his men and their courage, and his mind ventured back to the time before. The time just after Lady Lucille came to Bordeleoux to marry the son of the Duke.

It was by the will of the Duke, and the urgings of Lady Lucille, that Sir Ferrans retinue expanded into a small army. The remaining eight proud knights under his command had swelled into a set of thirty proud knights, most of them young and impetuous. Another twenty archers and fifty Men at Arms, selected from the counts own host. The troops had not come cheap and if it had not been for the words of the Damsel, to explain the wishes of the Lady herself, then he was certain that the dear Duke would not have given him what he needed to fulfil his quest.

After having arrived at Bordeleoux, and bringing the Lady Lucille to her husband to be, visions had disturbed his sleep. Visions of the lands of sand, and an unseen darkness lurking over it, yet the message was clear, to return the body of Saint Montard, and the Sword of the Lake he wielded. The Lady of the Lake had found him wanting and given him a place to go, to earn his right to drink from her cup.

The call had gone out, that a ship was prepared to ship down to Araby and the sandy dunes, and Knights Errant and the occasional Questing knight, from all over Bretonnia had come to answer the call.

Arthur Ferran and his trusted old friend Maurice DeGuile had when the spring came the following year set sail upon their new quest with the blessings of Lady Lucille.

The Madame Eternal and The Grace De Lions were the ships that brought the two hundred men strong army southwards. The captains of the ship and the Lady’s blessing granted an uneventful journey, not counting the occasional fight among the lesser caste.

”With her blessed Lady crying.
In southern lands her knights were dying.
The great Knights fought greatly.
But of their names no one have heard of lately.
The lands of sand, governed by long dead kings.
Their only gift to our brave knight only death brings.
Only one were to survive.
And his best friend the Kings would revive.

The poetic prose was without warning cut short, as a clay tankard filled with foaming ale used as a projectile came towards Jean-Luc. With a surprised yelp did the minstrel manage to tilt the chair to the side to allow the mug to crash harmlessly against the wall behind him. Following the tankard was something that cannot be anything but a cursing in a crude language.

The whole tavern fell into silence and all eyes including the minstrels turned towards the two men sitting alone at one of the side tables. ‘Recent arrivals’ Jean-Luc thought for himself as he studied the two, must have been to focused on the stranger in the corner to have missed these two he figured.

They both sported a set of thick dark burly beard and the cut of their brown tunics if nothing else gave away their Imperial heritage. Dark green cloaks hung over their shoulders, held in place with a golden imperial hammer pin.

“Ich have never heard a bigger load of Scheiße. Sing something about great Sigmar instead Dummkopf ja!”
the larger of the two called out.

'By the lady’ Jean-Luc thought for himself as just hearing hard cut Reikspiel caused his head to ache, how could such a crude people have followed step by step with a chivalric nation as his own.

He like the rest of the people in the tavern, could not miss the two great swords that was resting against the Imperial’s table, and unlike the rest of the patrons in here, Jean-luc knew what the red and black, puffed up, sleeves of their shirts meant.

Time seemed to stand still, and most of the patrons seemed to hold their breath as they waited to hear the minstrels

reply.

Jean-Luc was in his own mind a decent swordsman, and had fought his share of duels, but he was not insane enough to go up against one of the Great swords of Carroburg, and never would he take on two of those sword masters.

“What on the Lady’s green fields are they doing here?” his mind raced as he tried to come up with something witty that would ensure his safety and the calm of the night.

Just as Jean-luc were about to speak up, did he notice how the cloaked man in the corner rose from his seat and spoke up in perfect Reikspeil. The words exchanged, was lost to the young Minstrel, but it had an effect on the two Carroburgers who with a snarl rose from their seats.

On cue, the patrons in the tavern, men at arm and farmers alike, scooted off too the sides to clear an area around the three.

One of the Imperials started to circle around to rid the table that was between him and his target, while the other lunged towards the hooded man with a closed fist. The hooded man swiftly, with the grace of the legendary people of Athel Loren, sidestepped the blow and sent one of his own gauntlet-encased hands upwards. His uppercut connected firmly against the jaw of the Imperial and sent him flying backwards.

All around knights fought, some still riding others demounted and swinging their swords against the undead foe blocking their path. Trying their best to hold the flank the men at arms formed a wall with their large shields, trying to keep the beasts at bay, as the archers sent volley after volley of arrows into the midst of the giant scorpions that was assaulting the flanks.

Ferran knew they would have to finish the battle quickly; the heat was something the undead did not suffer from.

He had fought the undead before, but this was something new. It was as if they these creatures were sentient and not just mindless beasts under the control of a foul sorcerer. Even the land seemed to be on the side of the undead guardians of the ruins; he had seen more then one horse or soldier sucked down into the sand with a scream.

Off to the left could he see Maurice, still mounted, leading a lance of knights back into the enemy formations. Their lances down as they rode in wedge formation, and with some satisfaction could he see the enemy crushed beneath the

hooves and lances of his dearest friends charge.

They tried their best to hit and run, move in and cause as much damage as possible, and then ride back out to come back again. At times, the charge came to a halt in the middle of the melee. Sir Lugh's, charge over on the right side, their lances now dropped as they hacked away at the skeleton troopers around them.

Ferran was in the midst of the battle himself, and could no longer count the amount of enemies that had fallen by his blade as he strode forth towards the stairs leading up and into the ruins, the final resting place of Sir Montard and the Sword Du Lac. Grey mare, his trusted steed had died a while ago, and the killer had met his final rest by his own hand moments later. Sweat ran down along his cheeks, and his eyes stung due to sand and sweat. His armour had never felt as heavy before as he took the first step up the stairs, blocking a rusted crude blade held by a large skeleton. Mustering his strength, he brought his own sword up in an arc splintering the ribcage of the enemy, and sending him crumbling to the ground.

'May the Lady protect me, and grant me strength.' The phrase repeated in his mind as he ascended the scarcely protected stairs. Behind him, the sound of battle waged on, the enemy fighting in silence, but the shouts in anger and the cries of pain by his fellow countrymen tore through the desert.

The battle between the Carrobuffers and the hooded man was over before it truly had begun. Jean-Luc, having experienced hundreds of tournaments and fights, could see that the skill of the hooded knight superseded that of the Imperial Sword masters by miles. With the first of the Imperials knocked out with the uppercut, the knight turned to face the others as he lunged towards him. Once again, the knight side stepped the attack and retaliated with a blow over the sword masters back, and a knee that crashed against the Imperials cheek with a resounding metallic clang, and a teeth-shattering crunch followed a quick blow over the back.

As fast as it had begun, it was over and the patrons of the tavern quickly lost interest in the two unconscious men. Some talked quietly, others shrugged while the hooded knight returned to his seat and untouched drink. Once he had taken his place once more, he gestured with an armour-clad hand towards Jean-Luc. 'Continue.' The hooded knight said with a perfect 'Anguille' accent. Jean-Luc coughed softly, and reached over for his cup of wine as all attention once again came upon him. Yet time was running short and the bed, he had earned for his services this evening called out to him. He hefted his lute, and resumed the melody of the tale.

Wandering through the maze of old.

Our brave young knight, so incredibly bold.

Behind him friends and soldiers died.

Could it be, the Lady lied?

Slowly fading, his once strong faith.

As before him, skeletons now numbered eight.

Sword in hand and shield at ready.

The Lady shone and made his hand so steady.

Cuts and scrapes covered every inch of his body as he slowly made his way further into, what he now feared would become his tomb. The blood from his cracked lips, were the only fluid he still could use to ensure that his tongue did not stick to the top of his mouth. The further he ventured inside, the darker it got and he cursed himself for venturing in unprepared. Neither torches nor water had he brought with him, then again it had been folly not to move as fast as possible. His friends and troops could only hold the enemy for so long. Having lost his sword in the last fight against the undead, and now armed with only his shield and dagger, he forced himself to enter the darkness ahead. With his right hand resting against the wall to his side, he slowly ventured deeper. Each step also created a wet crunching sound but, due to the lack of light, he had no idea what he was treading on. As he turned a corner, a soft green light could be seen further down the hall and a renewed strength returned as he hurried his steps.

Jean-Luc could not stop himself from thinking about the rolling waves hammering up on the shores of L'Anguille as he watched the man coming towards him. It was the stomach that rolled side to side and up and down, with each step under the tightly stretched, grease stained, white shirt he wore. An apron, that by the looks of it, most certainly had seen its fair share of slaughter did its best to hide the obese form of the man that slowly made its way over towards Jean-Luc. "You have truly earned you silvers Minstrel, and the key to the room I promised." Jean-Luc could barely hide his contempt for the fat tavern keeper before him, and a shiver ran down his spine as the fat man pressed his oily hand on Jean-Luc's shoulder. Where Jean-Luc's smile, at least in his own mind would charm the fairest of elven maidens, the tavern keep's smile would scare even the foul lord of disease. It was with mixed feelings of relief for finally being able to go to bed, and revulsion of actually touching skin to skin with the tavern owner, as he pressed his oily hand with the key into Jean-Luc's.

"Would you find it, to taxing to send one of the serving maids with a bath up to my room?" Jean-Luc said as he took out a handkerchief from a pocket in his vest. He examined the embroidered silk, and considered if it would ruin the memories of Lady Mendrial of Paravon if he used it to clean his hands. His eyes drifted from the handkerchief to his hands, and when he saw a droplet of grease about to fall from his fingers, he quickly dismissed what ever the fair duchess would think about how he used her gift of love. "I'll send it up myself." "Ahh. Well see I was hoping to..." "Nonsense, a skilled minstrel as you should receive the best of services. Who else but me can offer that? Do not worry yourself." "What have I done to deserve this?" Jean-Luc said softly to himself as he watched the Tavern owner walk off with a shrug that set his body into a rocking motion. "By the Lady, I'm going to be sick." Jean-Luc could feel how his stomach was about to turn inside out and quickly turned to retire to his room.

Overall, it had been a good evening, and it had taken some smooth talking to get the patrons to leave the tavern when it came to closing hours. The only one who had left without a fuss was the hooded knight. On tired legs, Jean-Luc made his way up the wooded stairs and entered his room. It was spartan at best, but it would suit his needs for the night. With a deep sigh, he removed the clothes on his upper half and placed them on the lone chair by the recliner, before he took a seat on the bed. He always hated, when he could not finish a story for the crowd but that fight with the Carroburgers had cost time and by the laws of the Duke Reginald, a tavern was only allowed to remain open until the Yeoman called twelve strikes. It was all to make sure that the peasants, when dawn came and work began anew, were not worn out.

A sound very much like a woodpecker, tapping its beak against a tree in the mythical forest of Athel Loren, was slowly drowned by that of a woodsman tending to his trade. The chopping of wood soon turned into the soft giggling voices, from the fairest of elven maidens, barely audible over the soft groaning sound that came from the ancient oaks. Jean-Luc opened his eyes and stared into pitch-black darkness. No, not total darkness, the soft green light of Morrslieb, one of the two celestial bodies, granted some illumination in the room. With a soft grunt, he slowly rose himself up and placed his feet on the floor. "Must have been more tired than I believed." He said softly as he rubbed his eyes and yawned "Indeed, I knocked but you did not awake." The reply was unexpected and in itself reason for a man to feel fear in a situation like this. However, Jean-Luc did not find himself frozen in fear over the fact that he was not alone, he knew that voice. That perfect L'Anguille dialect, he had heard it earlier this very night.

He swallowed deeply and glanced around in the dim light, to find the source of the voice. Jean-Luc felt a shiver run down his spine as all his well-tuned senses caught, what could only be described as a barely noticeable change of the wind in the room. "Magic" he thought for himself a second before the lantern on the bed stand came alight. With no visible source of ignition, a bright flame appeared inside the glass casing, and it illuminated the whole room. Sitting on the same chair, where he had put his clothes, the hooded knight now sat. No visible weapons, he sat comfortably and with his arms crossed over his chest. "What do you want?" Jean-Luc said as he marvelled over the fact that even this bright light did not seem to penetrate the shadows cast down by the hood to shield the stranger's face from view. "Merely for you to complete your tale Minstrel, I was most intrigued. I will make it worth your while I assure you." The stranger said and gestured with a slight nod over towards the bed stand where the lantern stood. Jean-Luc followed the nod with his gaze and for the first time noticed a large pouch standing just behind the lantern. Once again, he swallowed hard, as he could easily see the contours of coins pressed against the cloth of the bag. "Thirty gold pieces Minstrel is far more than any payment a tavern will ever pay for you to complete a tale is it not?" "Thi. Thirt." Jean-Luc had trouble to form the word in his mouth as he stared at the pouch. If the stranger told the truth, it contained more money than he ever had owned

"Thirty gold pieces will be more than. Yes it should cover it, just let me fetch my lute." Entering the deepest rooms. He found the living saint's final resting place. Its eternal glory forever kept from disgrace. Young Sir Ferran, came face to face with the King of Tombs. Filled with strength from the Lady he refused to make this his last stand. Valiantly he charged with sword in hand. He clashing of swords and spilling of blood he fought so glorious. Until he alone stood victorious.

The horrors outside, were nothing compared to the sight young Ferran faced when he entered the deepest room of the tomb. The final resting place of the saint Sir Montard, were far from sacred these days as glyphs burned brightly in a sickly green light along the walls. There was no touch of the Lady's blessing in this forsaken tomb, as Ferran with his sword drawn stood face to face with the owner of the tomb. "By the Lady." Ferran managed to whisper, as his eyes rested upon the cursed form of the vilest of enemies. Despite time and wear, the fleur-de-lis was visible on the aging tunic that hung loosely over the glistening suit of heavy armour, worn by the Tomb lord. "The Lady has no power here, mortal." The Tomb Lord said, with a perfect bretonnian accent, as it wrapped its hand around the hilt of the intricate liquid like sword by its side. The two, stood at opposite ends of the crypt and watched each

other in silence. The dead and the living, both with swords ready, were like the mirror image of each other. When Ferran made the slightest of moves, the Tomb Lord countered. Fear slowly began to take hold of his body, and Ferran found he could not bring himself to attack. A slight shiver in his knees soon turned into aching joints and his sword once more seemed to gain weight. The Tomb Lord laughed, mocking the pride and honour of the Bretonnian knight as it, with the speed of a mountain lion, charged. The sword cut through the air, leaving a trail like it cut through water, and Ferran could do nothing but await his impending doom. A loud metallic ring echoed in the crypt as blade met blade. In surprise, Ferran watched as he had managed to raise his blade to block the attack. His muscles strained, as he now had to fight to keep his own blade up to fend off the Tomb Lord's. The Tomb Lord pushed, and Ferran found he had to give ground. With a quick step backwards, he managed to cause enough room to manoeuvre but once again, the Tomb Lord countered with another charge.

The lethal dance, like the dances at the court, had one that lead, one that followed and Ferran found himself acting the woman of this dance, as he followed and blocked the attacks. As in the battle waged outside, Ferran began to suffer under the stress of fighting in a suit of armour and with each attack his own block came slower. 'I am really going to die down here. I do not wish to die, think Arthur, think.' A biting pain, took Ferran's mind back to the fight at hand. He glanced down to his left and saw a deep gash in his tunic, and the surrounding areas quickly turned red as it soaked up the blood from his wound. Barely able to gather his thoughts, Ferran stumbled backwards as he saw the Tomb Lord's blade soar towards him once again. In desperation, the young knight moved his own blade to intercept. 'I'm going to die, Lady save me, this is it.' The sound of metal against metal rang once again, but this time Ferran was not able to muster enough to stop the Tomb Lord's blade. Again, pain filled Ferran's every fibre and his vision swam as the blow cut over the left side of his face. The metallic tang of blood filled his mouth as he stumbled backwards once more, and this time only the wall behind him saved him from falling to the floor. 'Oh Lady I'm going to die.' He was everything through a red veil, and every form seemed to swirl in and out of focus. By reflexes, he raised his sword once again and felt the force from the Tomb Lord's attack as he by sheer luck had managed to, partially, block the blow once again. The tip of the foul Lord's blade cut into his chest and split his chain mail as if it was a piece of parchment. With cuts and scrapes, Ferran could feel his life slowly seeping out. His body coated in blood and sweat under his armour, and now he had to force himself to lift his sword. Pressed against the wall, Ferran could imagine the grin on the Tomb Lord's face as he savoured every moment of this torment, and in this game, he was the mouse trapped under the cat's claws. 'Someone, help me...'

The sound, sounded like thunder for the wounded knight, the sound.

Ferran could not quite place the sound, yet it was all so familiar it sounded like.

He broke away from his current thoughts as the impending doom was knocking on his door and he tried to focus his blurring vision.

'Where is he, why doesn't he kill me and have it done with?' Ferran's mind was in turmoil, as he could not phantom why he was still alive, if only barely, and as he kept returning to trying to place that sound.

'The Minstrel in Bordeloux!' The memory flashed before his mind, and the image of the minstrel's face when the a string of his lute had snapped, while he was playing for the duke.

Yet if anything at all, this memory only pushed Ferran into deeper confusion as he leaned against the wall of the tomb.

“Master.”

Ferran shook his head, as tried to lift his sword to no avail.

“All hope is lost good boy, at least it was a great quest while it lasted.” Defeat, like a black cloud slowly crept into the mind of the young knight.

“Master!”

The Tomb Lord appeared before his vision once again and reached out a hand to grab a hold of him.

Having accepted his defeat already, Ferran did not even try to stop him, and was rather surprised as the vision of the Tomb Lord came into focus as he was shook.

The tunic, were not replaced by a tasteless white tunic and the mummified features, albeit foul enough to scare a child to death, were full of life.

“Master, we have little time..Get a hold of yourself!” The Tomb Lord urged.

‘This makes no sense, no sense at all.’

Ferran shook his head and blinked a couple of times, until his vision finally cleared.

The man before him was not the Tomb Lord, instead he found himself staring into what must have been one of the ugliest peasants in all of Bretonnia, his to Ferran his ugly face was fine enough to almost kiss at this point.

As his vision cleared, so did the rest of his dulled senses, and in the background he could hear the Tomb Lord roar in anger. The peasant, lost to him for a moment, as he looked beyond him and saw the undead master clutch his hands around the shaft of an arrow jutting out from his chest.

The sacred sword was on the ground between them.

“Master, hurry!” The peasant urged, and Ferran with some newfound energy and the help of his new benefactor pushed himself from the wall and reached for the Sword Du’Lac.

“Use the sword, and slay the foul fiend.”

“Our Quest nears its end my friends.”

Ferran looked out over the surviving heroes of Breton, as they stood on the sandy dunes outside the Tomb.

The sand around their feet, littered with the bones of the restless foe and soaked in the blood of their friends.

“The sacred Sword of the Lady, rests once more in the hands of her loyal servants. We journey now back to our homelands, and reap our reward.”

Just speaking took all his strength, and he was grateful for the assistance offered to him by the lowborn Vall that had come to his rescue in the fight against the Tomb Lord.

Despite the casualties, and the heat, his men greeted his words with a loud cheer.

Epilogue

It was mid day, when the tavern keeper, knocked on the door to Jean-Luc’s quarters. The dear Minstrel had ignored the bath the night before and today, both breakfast and lunch.

“Minstrel, I am sorry to bother but I have other guests in need or rooms.” He called through the door, but like before no answer.

’Damned be that fop of a minstrel, he may be good but I can’t spare a room for him if he does not play.’

He brought forth his ring of keys and with a deep sigh; he unlocked and opened the door.

Upon the bed, lay the restless pale body of the Minstrel. The only visible damage made, were two small puncture holes on his neck.

The hooded knight huddled in cover of the sun, in the old abandoned shrine several miles from the tavern.

He had his next destination in mind, and was eager to reach it in hopes of finding new trails in the search of a worthy adversary.

Bordeloux.

(More to come in the following tale of Sir Arthur Ferran)