

Questing Chronicles. II

Friday, 01 July 2011

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The Roth Saga

Part Four

Â Lord Roth brought his broadsword down with punishing force to cleave through the crude wooden shield and left forearm of the orc that had futilely attempted to distract him from his true opponent.

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Â "Me 'and! me Gorkin' 'and!" Squealed the greenskin in some distress.

Â The Lord Roth, covered as he was in blood, gore and viscera was in no mood for conversation.Â With a single stroke, heÂ sliced through the heavily muscled neck of the orc; sending an arterial spray pulsing into the air from the dyingÂ creatures wound. Kicking theÂ corpse away, he cleared the space around him of opponents with broad wide sweeps of his blade and began to take their measure.

Â Six foul smelling orcs were attempting to rush him and were steeling themselves for the attack, when the Lord Roth suddenly struck out first. Leaping forward he extended his arm out and thrust the point of his sword deep into the stomach of the orc to his right, gripped his blade with two hands and tore it out through the beast's side. Causing the strickenÂ orc to drop it's rusty axe and claw in vain at the wet innards that were suddenly spilling from it. As one, the remaining orcs were upon him as he forcefully freed his blade from the slippery contents of their dying comrades body. He grudgingly acceptedÂ a blow to his unprotected side to allow him space to bring his blade to bare, and began deftly deflecting wild swings from his incensed opponents.

Â The lord Roth then recieved the savage strike of an orc axe to his right thigh, causing a rent in the armour and jagged flesh wound. Spurred by the sudden pain, he slammed his left plate armoured fist into the howling greenskins face and smiled grimly as teeth and tusk broke under the impact of his blow. The astonished orc clasped it's bleeding and ruined mouth in shock and reeled away from the melee, allowing Lord Roth to step into the momentarily vacated space. Ducking

the blow of an axe trying to part his head from his shoulders, Lord Roth quickly dropped to one knee. Before he lunged forwards head first into the chest of the axe wielding orc, and felt the hard, wet, fleshy impact of the antlers that adorned his helmet sinking deeply into the greenskins body. The incredulous orc fell back in stunned disbelief, tearing Lord Roth's helmet from his head and causing the knight a heavily bleeding cut to his right eyebrow.

Suddenly, Kalidus rushed back into the fray with his mighty hooves flailing and strong broad teeth biting. The mighty warhorse barreled into the orc band violently, scattering them and allowing Lord Roth to casually walk forward and press his sword point into the chest of the orc he had just punched in the face; piercing its heart. It fell instantly, with only a watery gurgle rattling from its blood filled throat. Kalidus himself, had also stoved in the thick skull of a club wielding orc and was flailing and bucking wildly at the two remaining greenskins. Lord Roth grimly cuffed away some of the blood that had been dripping in profusion into his right eye and rushed towards the melee.

Roaring in fury and intent Lord Roth grabbed the shorter of the two orcs and turned it to face him, even a cowardly beast like an orc would bear its wounds to the front when facing Lord Roth. Sidestepping the thrust of the axehead, Lord Roth pressed forward and put his arm around the back of the orc's neck; trapping the orc's axe-arm against its body. Then using the pommel of his sword, he proceeded to beat the thrashing orc to death. Kalidus sensing his master's mood slowly backed away from the last orc allowing the lone greenskin time to take in the events that had transpired in the mere moments, since the grey warhorse had re-entered the fray.

It stood nearly seven feet tall, huge rippling slabs of muscle adorned the beast and unlike the other orcs, this one was almost jet black in colour. Its fetid breath misted in the cool damp forest air as the mighty lungs worked furiously to find respite. Lord Roth slowly walked over and faced the orc that now stood some six feet away. This was the orc he had been wanting to face, this was his true opponent. It was definitely the leader of the orc band, in its ham sized fists it held a fine double-handed sword in an iron grip, whilst grasped firmly in the right hand was Lord Roth's own saddlebags containing the Insignia of the Quest within.

The damn things had come upon what they had thought was a deserted camp with an old horse asleep and leaning against a tree. They had looted the camp in an utter frenzy, casting many of Lord Roth's own possessions across the leaf covered forest floor. They had the closed in on the old horse, and were about to kill and eat Kalidus when the warhorse had finally awoke with a thunderous whinny, and begun to strike out against the thieving greenskin's. Lord Roth who had taken to sleeping in trees ever since Kalidus' sleep disorder had began to get out of hand, had awoke alarmed and disoriented and had fallen out of the tree. Violently breaking his recently re-set ribs against most of the branches on his way down. Cursing vehemently he dragged his sword from its scabbard and had beset the thieving cads.

Kalidus and himself had been fighting and killing greenskins for nearly half an hour and the forest was littered with their swiftly spoiling corpses. All that was left was this git and he was about to receive the Lord Roth's full attention. Which almost always, resulted in a damned severe thrashing.

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Sometime later.....

Â Anger had left him, taking with it the illusion of strength and fortitude and leaving the reality of weakness and weariness. The orc boss was dead, its quickly stiffening body lost amidst the throng of greenskin corpses that now littered the forest floor. Having made his way stoically to Kalidus' side and feeling the full weight of his years, the Lord Roth made several feeble attempts to throw his recovered saddlebags across his steed's broad back before success was finally made. Drawing in a ragged breath he strained to lift a very fine double-handed sword up into a series of straps behind the fine leather saddle that adorned Kalidus' hind quarters. With his face beginning to purple with effort, he finally managed to tighten the cinches and secure the fine blade.

Â It had been in possession of the orc boss and bore the symbol of the unicorn, the favoured emblem of the sons of Quenelles. Such an artifact deserved to be treated with honour and not left to rust amongst the decaying corpses of such loathsome beasts. If he could return it to the noble line with the same heraldry, then he would do so. And if not, perhaps he would lay it respectfully within one of the Grail Chapels found in Quenelles.

Â Lord Roth, hampered as he was by broken ribs and a deep wound to his right thigh, could not mount the saddle. He instead wound the reins tightly in his left fist, gripped the saddlehorn in his right and leaned heavily against his mount's side. Kalidus needed no urging and they both left the carnage of the skirmish far behind them.

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The Roth Saga.

Part Five

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Â Lord Roth was poised to strike, his musclesÂ taught with tension and his face showing the strain of his complete concentration. With a flash of speed, his right hand darted through the clear flowing water to delicately grasp his prey.

Â "Gotcha!" he exclaimed in his deep voice, "Another for the pot here Kal" he called to his faithful steed who was watching the ludicrous antics of its master with total disinterest.

Â With quick careful steps Lord Roth waded through the calf deep water taking care not to lose his footing on the smooth slippery pebbles that covered the small stream bed.

Â "Ow! Ouch..ooh." he muttered under his breath as the creature in his hand began to liven up after it's abduction from the stream and nip and pinch unmercifully at the hand enclosing it. With even quicker steps the Lord Roth scrambled up the gravel bank, past his now snoring horse and raced to the small camp set up beneath the cover of a magnificent weeping willow.

Â "Into the pot my aggressive friend, you have been cordially invited to dinner. Ha!" cried lord Roth and deposited the freshwater crayfish into the rolling boil of the water filled pot.

Â "Ah, what a blessed bounty." whispered the ageing knight to himself as he lay down next to the fire to dry off before eating.

Â It was now three days after the fight with the orcs and he was finally beginning to feel a bit better. Who knows how far Kalidus had managed to drag him that night, it had to have been a great distance for the tress were no longer Birch. All he remembered was waking to darkness and pain. And realising that something had to be done about the wound to his thigh that was still bleeding out. Luckily he always carried a store of kindling and sticks within his packs and was able to start a small fire to examine the wound. Realising it was worse than he had first thought, he added all the remaining wood to the fire and brought out the very last of his store of brandy. He had cleaned the area as best as he could with water but on inspection the cut was very ragged and the skin and flesh surrounding the open wound too heavily bruised to stitch. His only option was to cauterise, and so poured his last reserves of brandy over both the thigh wound and his hunting knife which he placed in his small fire. Kalidus in anticipation, began to whinny and pace in concern as Lord Roth removed the glowing blade from the embers and brought the blade to bare upon his open flesh.

Â On examiningÂ his thigh when he came to, he wasÂ greatly relieved. He had managed to stay conscious long enough to draw the blade down theÂ entire length of the cut and sear the wound closed perfectly. Still too weary to mount Kalidus, he had let his horse drag him onwards to new surroundings as the nature of the Quest did not allow a knight the luxury of spending too long in one place, even to heal. When he had finally awoke his eyes were met by a beautiful scene. A bubbling stream flowing swiftly over well worn rocky falls and outcrops. A wood of beech and willow, and a pale yellow coloured gravel bank at the bend of the stream.

Â In awe, he had explored the glade. AndÂ with some difficulty due to his stiff leg, but had managed to find many edible plants. And on searching the stream in hope of finding fish, he had instead found a vast swathe of crayfish. He had quickly gathered some wild garlic and some sorrel leaves and had proceeded to make camp, after which he had stripped off and went crayfish hunting and had made a truly wondrous discovery.

As the water of the stream fell onto the deep pool there was a large yellow boulder, which he was expecting to offer shadow and safety to those crayfish he was hoping to find massed there. Instead had found a Fleur d' lys carved into the opposite side of the stone. In rapture he had knelt in the water for an uncountable time praying to the Lady who had guided him to this enchanted place. When he finally stood and made his way to the lower pool he realised that his thigh no longer hurt and when he examined the area all there seemed to be was a very faint silver scar. Truly humbled he had returned to his camp and sat in contemplation as he sorted through the events that had transpired recently.

Somehow without him to guide the way, Kalidus had headed deeper into the forest from where Lord Roth had felt the presence pulling at him with ethereal hands to Chalons very heart. He now understood that it was no coincidence. His feelings, the skirmishes fought and the events that had occurred upon his entering of the forest they were all leading him here, to this place and this moment. He knew that his being here in this holy place was a chance to approach his test afresh and healed. And ready to face what was there to be faced. And to confront his true purpose within this mighty forest realm.

And so it was that he bathed in the crystal pools, washed and groomed Kalidus. Using oil and sand he polished his armour to a mirror finish, sharpened and oiled all of his blades, including the one taken from the orc boss. He had hunted, gathered and partook of the Lady's bounty. And now, he was resting. Soon he would be garbed for war and he and Kalidus would head out into the true heart of the forest and meet their destinies,

He was ready.

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The Roth Saga.

Part Six

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Â The watery rays of the mid-day sun filtered through the leafy canopy of the forest, casting dizzying displays of light to dance upon the mossy ground as the leaves blew gently in a westerly wind. For half a day the Lord Roth had travelled from the enchanted glade, seeking the force that had drew him so deep into Chalons primordial heart. The trees that grew here were truly mighty specimens, ancient and eternal they stood in silent vigil over their woodland realm.

Â Lord Roth searched his surroundings with complete concentration, his eyes roaming with piercing intensity across this incredible landscape spread out before him. The forest was eerily silent, no birdsong could be heard emanating from the tree tops and no animals split the air with their shattering cries. The only sounds to be heard was the wind lightly blowing through the leaves and the creaking of the gnarled tree boughs.

Â There seemed to be a break in the treeline ahead and to the left of Lord Roth, and with tiny movements of the reins and a gentle squeeze of his thighs he spurred Kalidus towards the gap. The thick ocean of moss that carpeted the forest floor dampened the sound Of Kalidus' hoofbeats as he bore his rider onward. The trees also began to thin out on either side of the horse and rider and light seemed to pour into the wood with greater intensity. Lord Roth felt his heartbeat quicken in anticipation as they pressed on, when suddenly Kalidus came to a complete halt. His brow wrinkled in confusion, as he tried to spur Kal forward without success. With a fluid movement Lord Roth kicked out of the stirrups and slide of the side of his steed.

Â "What is it Kal? are ye hurt?" he asked of his horse who could only answer by looking to his master with it's large black glossy eyes.

Â As Lord Roth began to bend down to search Kalidus for any signs of lameness or hurt, he was struck by a realisation. Stepping back he could see the mighty warhorses muscles strain and tense as it fought against an unseen force.

Â "Easy old friend" he rumbled in his deep voice. "It appears i must face my trial alone greatheart."

Â With exquisite care he removed the saddlebags and gear from his steeds wide, strong back and deposited them onto the ground. Next he removed the saddle and undid the cinches, this was also placed on the ground. From his packs he removed his broadsword and girded himself for battle, With reverence he removed his holy relic, the insignia of the quest from the saddlebags and kissed the blessed item before tucking it beneath his gorget. He left his black antler adorned helmet where it was and made his way to Kalidus' head. With a Lump in his throat and his eyes misting he reverently removed Kal's bit and bridle and placed this next to the saddle on the ground. When he arose, he took Kal's mighty head in his hands and rested his forehead upon his steeds.

Â "Ah, my brave lad." he crooned soothingly to his trembling mount.

Â "We have been together through so much, i never thought we would have to part like this at the end." he whispered in a breaking voice. For an age they stood thus, Lord Roth gently stroking Kal's neck. When finally Kalidus had ceased to tremble and was beginning to calm, Lord Roth raised his head to look into his steeds liquid eyes.

Â "Your the bravest and best of them lad, my truest companion." Lovingly he kissed the white blaze on Kalidus' forehead.

Â " If i don't return...Live well boy, live well."

Â Turning swiftly he headed towards the break in the trees, behind him Kalidus' mighty head was drooped down, and his ears lay flat upon his skull dejectedly as he watched his master leave. Lord Roth left the glistening tears on his cheeks to dry in the wind as he made his way onwards alone to his destiny.