

Questing Chronicles. IV Endgame

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The Roth Saga.

Endgame.

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The sky roiled and roared with the erratic flashes of jagged lightning and the broodingly dark rumbles of the darkest thunderclouds. Impossibly swift and powerful wind whipped through the ancient stone circle, tearing vast swathes of thick moss and debris from the floor of the forest glade. The all encompassing pressure of the air was enough to crush a mans spirit and press down upon his very soul.

The forest, the sky and the land, were completely consumed by this elemental storm of primal power. It saturated everything and all. Permeating, suffusing, encomapassing and immersing the physical, the mental and the spiritual. This was the end of all that is, all that was and all that ever would be. And lying prone and brutally broken upon the floor of the forest lay a mortally wounded man in sundered black plate armour.

Lord Roth gazed in bewildered awe at the raw fury of the primordial force of the storm that had howled into sudden life as he lay dying upon the moss blanketed ground. Every one of his quickly diminishing senses were straining at the monumental effort of comprehending the scene that his clouding eyes beheld. His ears began to throb painfully and continually at the enormity of both the ceaseless sound and the immesurable pressure. So much so, that a trickle of his swiftly draining lifeblood began to collect in the bowl of each of his ears before dripping and adding to the expanding pool of blood that he lay in.

Never before had he felt so weak or enfeebled. His breath came to him in tiny, shallow draws, that caused a watery gurgle to sound from somewhere deep inside his chest. He suspected that a few of his ribs had punctured and torn his left lung, causing a slow and steady bleed. Perhaps the fact that he had so many other free flowing cuts upon his body had slowed the filling of his lungs with lifeblood to scupper the chances of his drowning in it. It was the only sumarisation that he could discern that would account for his death lasting so long. The thought only served to make him even more peeved and exhasperated about his predicament.

Suddenly, from the corner of his darkening sight he caught the flash of a small white dove speeding past him and beyond where his sight would allow. With all of the miniscule effort his broken being would allow, the Questing Knight tried to turn his head to follow the doves flight. It was not enough. As he lay there awaiting death, he realised that he had seen a few white doves within the forest. Perhaps they were the remnants of some nobles pigeonaire or peasants dovecote that had escaped and become wild. He quickly threw the thought aside as his ponderings had been suddenly shattered by the

sound of a womans voice in song.

It came from behind him and to his left. A beautiful, pure and hauntingly familiar voice that somehow was able to be heard above and beyond the thundering roar of the raging storm. A voice that caused his throat to constrict and his eyes to weep in hopeless longing for someone he had lost long ago. The whole while the song was being sung, the storm above had been gathering closer together. It seemed to compact and compress upon itself, concentrating its power into something much more potent, destructive and volatile. The endless song seemed to rise to match the swiftly coalescing concentration of the storm by increasing in clarity, cadence and conviction.

For what seemed eons, the song and the storm continued to challenge each other, each becoming even greater than before. One striving against the other, to be heard above all and over everything. It was agonisingly deafening. Lord Roth's tears of loss swiftly became tears of excruciating pain as his very being was bombarded with almost tangible sound. The tortured knight did not even have the strength to lift his arms to cover his ears in a futile attempt to block the sound. A sound that would not be denied being heard. The ruined knight began to scream a single scream. A cry of unimaginable anguish that could not be heard above the conflict of the song and the storm. A scream that came not from a body that was beyond the strength to accomplish such a feat, but a cry that sounded from his very soul.

Even as his own cry fought to find purchase against the impregnable wall of sound created by the song and the storm, a part of himself realised that the familiarity of the source of the song was not who he had forlornly wished it to be. It was not that of his beloved Susanna. This single thought, even more than the pain and suffering that he was experiencing, caused the tortured knight the most agony. For just a few miniscule moments he had actually believed that the voice was truly hers. Lord Roth's broken heart, a wound that had never healed in the six years since her passing, was brutally torn open even further. The cry of his heart joined that of his soul, and somehow, and impossibly he could hear it.

The feat both astonished and terrified him, but even more than this. It allowed something that was so precariously hovering over the precipice of death to flare up and burn a path from that place outward, and challenge those very powers that had believed themselves above and beyond all others in their contested confrontation. The cry of Lord Roth's spirit joined and entwined the cry of his soul and together they wrapped and weaved themselves through the cry of his heart. And the cry was a cry no longer. It had suddenly become a roar.

The song and the storm coalesced into an even greater pair of challenging entities at the intrusion of this upstart other. The other however, would not and would never be denied. The roar itself became greater than the sum of it's parts and began to envelop the others dampening their sound and smothering their power. The song was the first to fall, though flee was a more apt description. The storm however, drew it's strength from another place and continued to distill it's raw power into an even smaller and more compact space.

Instinctually the roar drew upon every resource it could from it's host. Along with the heart, spirit and soul of it's patron, it began to take all that was rising and freely given from it's nexus and channeled it into a true and tangible form. The storm in answer began to shift and change it's own form, from an embroiled mass of seething cloud, furious sky and thunderous malice into something even more terrifying. In the sky above the ring of ancient standing stones, two manifestations began to present themselves.

The first and greatest of the entities began to take on the form of a beast borne from a thousand nightmares. A vast armoured creature of bullish form and behorned visage began to appear, created and made from still living blood. It's

massive transparent body was a mass of veins, vessels and arteries that forced a raging storm of blood throughout an impossible maze of muscle like forms. It was beyond the size of comprehension. It's ethereal and mist like quality lent it a dream like cast as it watched the materialisation of it's enemy.

The second and smaller of the entities began to take the shape of a somewhat serpentine and dragon like form. It drew it's power from it's host and the forest below. A creature of mist, water and dew, it hung in the sky almost in an embryotic shape as it grew in size. Suddenly the dragon shape burst forth from it's shell like constraints to flare open massive wings of exceptionally fine rain that fell and reformed perpetually. The whole creature seemed made of less substance than the bull like beast, and was much smaller. It was as smoke on the wind, as moisture in the air. It was beautiful.

At some unseen and unheard signal the two beasts charged each other and began the battle for dominion. The beast of blood was far, far stronger than it's opponent. The creature of mist however, had agility and grace with which to combat the brutish and abrupt efforts of it's nemesis. Again and again the ethereal forms crashed into each other, with neither one giving any in their immense struggle. The bullish creature used the massive horn that adorned it's head to tear into the form of the dragon, whilst the other used deadly talons and teeth of ice to rake and bite at the beast.

Each and every time the creatures clashed and managed to wound the other, vast amounts of rain would begin to fall from them. Cool, sweet and cleansing rain from the dragon, and warm, metallic and contaminating rain of living blood from the bull. The circle of standing stones was absolutely saturated and engulfed by the torrential downpour of ceaseless rain and blood. Even on the floor of the forest glade the entities fought, with the blood trailing and mixing with the water. Each one trying to dilute and wash the other out of existence.

One of the vast wings of rain adorning the dragon was suddenly torn to watery shreds by the horned beast, forcing the drake to wrap and coil it's serpentine form around that of the bull. The beast became consumed by fury at this act, bucking and rearing in an effort to dislodge his foe and bring it's deadly horn to bear upon it once more. The dragon held on regardless, tightening and constricting it's hold even more and bit deeply into the muscled neck of the bull.

Even as the drake triumphantly sank it's ethereal teeth into the neck of the beast, the balance quickly shifted. Huge, jagged and barbed spikes of blood suddenly burst forth from the beast, piercing the dragon in innumerable places. The drake threw back it's mighty head, and let out a silent scream of pure agony. Even as it cried it continued to tighten it's hold upon the bull, and instinctively raked the beast with it's talons of ice.

Both beasts were soon mortally wounded and rapidly losing strength. As the fight now lay, the beast would outlast the drake. It would outlast it and win the conflict. And that was something the host of the dragon could never allow. The patron of the dragon offered unto it, all that was left of him. He had given his heart, spirit and soul to the dragon, and now he gave it his will, he gave it his faith and he gave it his love. The dragon needed only one more gift from him to win. And without hesitation, Lord Roth of Bastonne, Questing Knight, and Paragon gave the dragon his life.

With a roar that snuffed out all semblance of sound, the dragon sank it's frozen teeth, talons and wingclaws into the beast of blood, and began to constrict with all the power it's host had given it. It crushed, eviscerated and with a final straining flex of it's empowered ethereal muscles, burst the beast of crimson apart. The bleeding bull exploded into a cloud of fine red mist before falling like rain upon the floor of the forest and covering the circle of standing stones in a sea of swiftly cooling blood.

Alone in the sky and triumphant, the dragon roared its challenge to the heavens and beyond. Its wounds began to fill with mist and heal. And in a matter of moments the ruined wing was also whole once more. With a few casual sweeps of its mighty wings, the drake flew even higher into the now still and azure sky. It hung there, gazing at the world below and at the ruin the blood of the beast had caused. The drake gave a last final shout in the voice of its host and began to fall apart. It fell in upon itself and gave back what it had taken from the forest by letting the water that had birthed it, fall in a cool sweet and cleansing rain.

It fell with vigour upon the land, diluting the blood that had previously fallen, consuming it and washing away the taint of its existence. It saturated the ground, enriching the soil with its pleasant kiss. It gave back to the forest what it had taken, but it could not give back what had been freely given. Within the stone circle lay the body of a knight washed clean of his own and the beast's blood. A knight who had rid the stone circle of an ancient evil. A knight who had given all that he was to win. A knight who died with a triumphant smile upon his now still face.