

# ARMOR QUEST

LEGENDS

## “LOST”

**Taken from the journals of Sir Sol,  
Knight of the Way**

I’ve been patrolling through the Northern Territories for the last year or so. Although sparsely settled, it can be dangerous, especially lately -- dragons from the far reaches of the North are becoming bolder and more common of a threat than I remember them being.

Patrolling is a lonely duty at times. It isn’t rare to go travelling between villages for days without seeing anyone at all. But I’ve learned to enjoy just being alone.

This will be my last tour of duty, though. I’ve been a Knight of the Way since . . . well, since my hair was much darker and thicker, my eyebrows were much less bushy, and my tired bones moved a whole lot quicker. Oh, and since I had both eyes, too! It’s been so long that there are times when I can’t remember life before I took the Oath of Knighthood.

But I do remember why I took the Oath. It was all thanks to the Emperor’s High Commander, the Emperor’s son and general of all his forces. The Knights of the Way were always actively recruiting back then. Followers of the Way were very common. Much more common than today . . . or at least that’s the way it seemed. But to be honest, I never even considered joining until I met the High Commander because, well, to be honest, the Knights that I had been in contact with were less than stellar examples of the ideals they professed.

I lived on the southern border of the Northern Territories, just outside Midland. My father, of course, expected me to follow in his footsteps as a shepherd. It wasn’t exactly what I wanted out of life, but it wasn’t as if I had a lot of choice in the matter and really, I didn’t know what I wanted out of life at that time anyway.

I was a young man when it happened -- the Year of the Basilisks. I guess that shows how old I am now. Most people these days have never even heard of basilisks: those small dragons born with an insatiable appetite. They didn’t breathe fire, but they still caused plenty of damage, devouring almost every living thing in their path. Some say they were born of the ashes after the dragons laid waste to the forests of the Northern Mountains. I don’t know about any of that, but I do know that one day they were only a whispered myth -- a story used to scare little children into behaving -- and the next day they leapt out of the legends and descended on our crops, our livestock, and even our kinfolk



like a plague of locusts.

They were carving a path south, advancing downward from the Northern Mountains, through the Northern Territories, toward Midland at a steady pace. The High Commander of the Knights of the Way made our small village his base of operations as he coordinated the host of knights in their mission to halt the basilisks.

Rumor had reached our ears that to the East and the West, four centuries of the Knights of the Way had stopped the basilisks' progression and kept it from spreading out more. But the main flock, the flock that gave birth to the others, was still bearing down directly toward Midland . . . and our village was right in their path.

And it was reported they would be there by morning.

Now basilisks are nocturnal creatures. So during the day, they rested in their hordes, huddled together in a cool place -- thousands and thousands of them -- piled around their queen in an impenetrable protective mound, until the sun was replaced by night's darkness. The High Commander's plan was to take his remaining one hundred troops out to find their roost during the day and terminate them while it was still light outside. He gave the people of my village strict instructions to stay in our barricaded homes where we would be safe. Once the roost was disturbed, even though the creatures would be sluggish in the sunlight, they would be angry and they would still have their great numbers, and some were sure to slip away from the ambush.

We all did as we were told. But as nightfall crept closer and we heard the desperate shrieks of the dying basilisks, I was struck by an irrational fear that my father's sheep might not be safe. I can say it was irrational now, able to look back on it through the lenses of wisdom and time, but at the time, it seemed quite logical to my young mind. Our herd was our livelihood and my future -- to lose them would be to lose everything.

I took my staff and ventured out into the dusk to my father's pen, where I counted the sheep. They were all fine. All safe.

As I left, though, a young lamb squeezed its way past me through the gate and darted into the night.

Cursing under my breath, I followed the lamb into the dark woods and attempted to catch it. Perhaps it was chance, perhaps it thought we were playing a game, but for one reason or another it eluded me.

When I finally caught it, I was thoroughly lost. I cradled it in my left arm and went forth with my staff in hand, looking for something -- anything -- that might be familiar to me so I could regain my bearings. It was then that I heard it . . .

It was not quite a growl. Not quite a purr. Not quite a clicking.

I turned around and there it was . . . a basilisk. Its eyes glowed red in the darkness. Its small form, barely larger than that of a barnyard cat, swayed back and forth on its hind legs. The light of the moon glistened on its teeth. Its bony, twig-like arms were extended in



front of it, its small claws curling and uncurling menacingly.

It leapt at me. I batted it away with my staff.

It hissed and scrambled back to its feet. Three more joined it, each emitting that awful sound.

I turned and ran. Terror drove me forward. Whenever the brittle branches and twigs from the trees tore at my body, I was sure that it was the claws of a basilisk about to bring me down.

And once they had you down, you were theirs.

Occasionally as I ran, out of the corner of my eye I could see one or two to my left or right. When I passed by they joined the chase. My ears were filled with the deafening beating of my heart, the piercing, shrill cries of the basilisks, and the desperate bleating of the tiny lamb I carried.

Finally, I broke through the trees into a clearing. I recognized the place . . . it was

a valley with a stream that led to my village. I had played among the rocks as a child and, when just a bit older, I snuck there in the middle of the night with Old Man Rasmus' daughter (I actually stole a kiss that night -- but that's another story).

I ran through the valley, hurdling over stones and splashing through the meandering brook until I found myself face to face with a score of basilisks.

It had been a trap. They herded me there like a helpless little lamb. They went through a lot of trouble to trap me. My only satisfaction was that I was a skinny kid and they wouldn't find me to be much of a meal -- I didn't have much meat on the bones back then.

As I stood there, more basilisks joined the others. I was completely surrounded.

One jumped at me and I batted it away. They were testing me. Teasing me. Another jumped, and again I batted it away. When I batted away the third one, I felt a sharp pain in my left shoulder. A



fourth one had attacked me from behind. I shook it off.

The circle began closing in. I looked around helplessly. Three of the beasts leapt at me. My staff connected with one, the other two clamped on my right arm and right leg. I screamed in pain. The lamb cried out. I fell to my knees. Their horrible humming drummed through my skull. But then a human voice cut through the chaos, "Away from him!"

A white horse galloped into the midst of the basilisks. The horse kicked the small dragons aside as its rider hopped off, his sword whirling around him in deadly arcs, sweeping the creatures away.

He cut a path through the creatures, joining me in the center of the horde, his horse following. I found myself being lifted off my feet and onto the horse, and he then swung himself up.

He spurred the horse forward and we galloped away.

Back to my village.

Back to my home.

It wasn't until after he delivered me to my parents that I realized who he was -- the High Commander himself. My father later told me that just before night fell, the High Commander and a few of his men had come around to each house to make sure that everyone was safe and to reassure them that he would protect them. My parents had just discovered that I was missing when he came and as soon as they told him, he left my family and his men and rode out alone to find me.

Meanwhile, the High Commander's century of warriors had taken care of most of the basilisks and had slain their queen. Once only a myth to us, they become a horrible reality, but soon faded into history.

But I will never forget that day. That was when I decided I would follow that man wherever he went. Because when I was lost, he came to find me. I was as good as dead, and he gave me a second chance to live.

I once asked the High Commander if he remembered that day. He said he did. I asked him why he came after me,

and he said, "Why did you run after the lamb, even though it was the smallest of your flock?"

"Because it was one of our sheep," I answered. "It was my duty to take care of it."

"Even at risk of your life?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"And aren't you worth much more than a tiny lamb?" he asked.

"Of course," I said. He smiled and patted me on the back and didn't say another word. He didn't have to. Actions, as they say, speak much louder.

That conversation took place after I took the Oath, during a maneuver on the southern tip of Amaria. But that's yet another story.

As I mentioned, the day the High Commander saved me was the day I decided to follow him. And that's exactly why I'm here patrolling the Northern Territories. It is my duty and it is my honor to serve him. But with this being my final tour of duty in the field, my last circuit protecting these nameless villages from various dangers, I expect to be reassigned to more gentle duty in the Imperial City. But it's been a good life, spiced with some danger and some adventure, made wholly worthwhile serving the High Commander.

**Illustrations by Kevin MacDougall**