

Visigothic:
Wizards and Kings
Epic One

Jay P. Newcomb

PIXFBIK

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For Joseph, My beloved Son

BOOK TWO: EPIC ONE

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A Note from the Author

I wish to express my gratitude to all my fans for joining in the adventure that is Visigothic. The Visigothic Saga has undergone major phases of development since the original first volume was written. That book became so large, that it had to be split into two volumes, one which became *Barbarians of Midgard*, and the second which became *Wizards and Kings*. Both were published, and since then I have gone on to write, as of this publication, ten volumes, six of which are published. During this time, I received advice from readers that the books were too large, and the chapters too long. However, in the case of *Wizards and Kings*, it was already published and the original publisher was unwilling to allow me to make the needed changes such as the updated spellings, and new material that needed to be added in, that was developed in the subsequent evolution of the story in later volumes.

Therefore, when that publisher announced that they were dropping my books and returning my rights, I was thrilled. This allowed me to produce new versions of the originals, with the needed updates. *Barbarians of Midgard* was republished quickly, and then I began working on *Wizards and Kings*. The updates to it, such as the introduction of maps and images, caused it to grow to an even larger book. Therefore, I divided it up into parts, as I had done in volume four. But by that time, it was at seven-hundred pages, and so I made the choice to divide it into two volumes. However, to do this, interfered with the volume numbers of those works already published. So, I hit upon the idea that it should still be one book, book number two in the series, but be divided into separate volumes called *Epics*, much in the way that Charles Dickens, in a Christmas Carol, labelled his chapters as Staves. However, I have chosen not to alter the chapter numbers, and volume two will pick up with the number

of the chapter which would have followed, if they had remained as one volume. I feel that this is necessary to preserve the original integrity of the order of the volumes which follow this one, as well as to emphasise, that while Wizards and Kings had to be broken up into two volumes itself, it is still one book, and not two. So now, I present you, my beloved readers with Visigothic: Wizards and Kings: Epic One.

PART ONE:
QUESTS OF THE HEART AND
OF THE SWORD



The Centre Midgard by Jay P. Newcomb

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.

A Tale of Two Cities

Charles Dickens

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*A long time ago in a dimension far away there was a
world called Midgard*

SETTING

Lothar the Skald continues to tell the story of the ancestors of the Visigoth during a long-ago winter's night, beside a hearth where hung a great iron pot of skause. Twas in the mead hall of King Roderick, and all the thanes were gathered with their families, when a child of seven, a boy happy, and strong dressed in brown clothing, and whose head of hair was long thick, and red, asked, "From whence came the Elves, oh noble Lothar?" The meadhall was filled with the flickering light of torches and lamps and a warm fire burned. King Roderick sat upon his throne, surrounded by his thanes, the Noble Warriors of the Blackhorse, and the great Jarls of the Visigoths.

PROLOGUE

Lemuria

From the Skald's Tale

“To thee, oh young Ragnar, son of Theod, I shall tell thee of these mysterious and mystical people. Twas told to our fathers by the elders, and written by the sages about the Primeval Age of Midgard, saying, “Behold it came to pass that the All Father saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the face of Midgard. All the nations of Midgard were of one tongue and one speech. As the decedents of Adam multiplied across the length and breadth of the one, single great continent called Lemuria, they built an exceedingly great city called *Atlantis*—we have never seen it’s like before or since. “When Loki, and the Vanier were cast out of Asgard, he resolved that Midgard would know no peace, so great was his jealousy over humankind. With him came one third of the *Aesir*, the hosts of Asgard whom we know as the Vanier, and from the Vanier came the Watchers, led by their Captain Semyaseh, and that evil prince, maker of weapons and talismans, Volundr, Black Smithy of the nether realms.

“They showed Midgard all manner of heavenly inventions but, however, some of the Watchers seized wives from among the daughters of men. All of whom they chose were beautiful and from these unions were born a race of giants, the Titans. Knowing that misfortune would befall the Watchers, Loki thought it wise not to mingle with humans, as did Semyaseh for they hated all humans.

“Behold the *All Father* found that among the sons of Seth there was one man and one family out of all the nations of Lemuria that had not corrupted themselves with Watchers or Titans: Lord Noaak, his wife, and their sons Shem, Ham and Yapet. *All Father* instructed Noaak to build a great, long ship—an Ark so massive that none has ever been its equal, even here in the third age of Midgard. The *All Father* sent to the ship two pairs of unclean animal species and seven pairs each of the clean, male, and female. He also sent the *Valkyries* to the Ark, and in it they placed the eggs of all the great non-sentient dragons, which the Lord wished to preserve upon the face of Midgard. Alas, when one hundred and twenty years had passed and the ship was complete, the *All Father* said unto Noaak, ‘Come thou and thy entire house into the ark; for I have seen righteousness before me in this generation’. Therefore, Lord Noaak did according to all that, *All Father* had commanded him to do. Noaak was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon Midgard. Noach went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives went with him, into the ark, because of the waters of the flood.

“In the one hundred and twentieth year after the beginning of the construction of the Ark, the *All Father* shifted the world. The fountains of the deep beneath Lemuria burst forth. The land was shattered like a clay pot and the fires of the underworld burst forth. The waters of the great ocean were spilled across the land and for forty days and forty nights it rained. Previous in Midgard there had not been one single mountain taller than nine thousand feet, and so all the hills and mountains were covered as the waters of the flood overflowed Midgard, and grew deeper, until the ark floated on the surface of the water.

“The water overpowered Midgard mightily; all the dry land under the entire sky were covered in a swirling cauldron of mud

and rock filled water, which covered the mountains by more than twenty-two and a half feet. All living beings that moved on Lemuria perished — dragons, birds, livestock, other animals, insects, and every human and sentient being, everything in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life; whatever was on dry land died. He wiped out every living thing on the surface of Midgard. Atlantis, and the cities of Nod were wiped out and only Noaak was left, along with those other sentient beings such as the *Wood Gnomes*, the *Kongeørn (Eagle Folk)* and the *Uglafolk (Owl Folk)*, even Gargoyles and several others who were with him in the ark. That great, good, and sentient *Luftdrakkon (Air Dragon)*, the good one of old, *Roldan* and his family, passed across the flood from that world into this one, and in the elder years following the flood, they could be seen in the fastnesses of the high fells and in the mores of Brythton. The water held power over Midgard for one hundred and fifty days.

Although many beings, and much life which lived in the great seas perished, the Merwif *Nechtán* and his family were spared the doom of *Watnagard* and so were allowed life—for it was he alone among the Merwif who had remained righteous, and had not intermarried with the Watchers. It was their women, who when seen in the sea by sailors gliding along on the waves with their dolphin friends, came to be called Mermaids and they were the Children of Mannan Mac Lir.

“Now, of the Vanier, many were like their Lord Loki, who had not left their exalted state to mingle with women. These, *All Father* allowed to escape, commanding Michael, Gabriel, Thor, Wotan, Baeldaeg, the Valkyries and many others who remained faithful among the Aesir of the Armies of Asgard, not to stop them. Therefore, they fled Midgard into the skies within their flaming chariots, in which they returned into the stars from whence they had come. But as for Semyaseh, *the All Father* did not spare him or the Watchers when they sinned, but threw them

into the Abyss, Tartarus, and imprisoned them in dungeons of deepest darkness, holding them for judgment, for Ragnarök, and Gotterdammerung.

“*All Father* said to the Mighty Ones of Asgard, his Holy *Angels* (Aesirim), ‘When I have remade Midgard, I will create a new race of spiritual beings in order that the world may have a nation of priests. These new beings, though like humankind in form and appearance, shall not come from the seed of Adam or Noak, but I shall form them from the energy of the universe, and the soil of the renewed Midgard. These shall I call, Elvarim, and the first will be a *Melchizideck*, a *King of Righteousness* and to his children shall I say, ‘Thou art priests forever after the order of Melchizideck. Him I shall call Yoshael, Salvation of God and my holy White Wizard shall he be and unto him I shall commit the Holy Language of Asgard, and the writing of my sacred oracles and with him shall go his wife, Zakarah whom shall be called Spirit Maiden and from them shall the entire race of the children of the All Father arise’”

Then said *All Father*: ‘Whereas before I gave Midgard to man to rule, now he will have to share it with other sentient life both good, and evil. The Elves will be there to guide them all in paths of righteousness, for indeed troubles will yet come again to Midgard, until the consummation of the three new ages and the fulfilment of its destiny, yet in the first Loki shalt thou bind.’” Since that day, their name, shortened to Elves, has been a high and holy nation. They are also called the Elbar or the Elvar. These names mean great things, for it is written in the Elven Oracle:

“I *Dan Ene Gud*, the *All Father* of all that is, have named them myself for **El** doth mean God—**Var** because they speak my words and **bar** for, they are my sons—Name meaning Word

of God. Elvar—Elvarim meaning; My most high words of God—**Elbar** meaning My most high Sons of God, for thus I have spoken to my sons and established them forever, and through my sons I speak. These shall not experience death as do my other creations, but will live until I call them home to that paradise which I have created for them, the realm of their afterlife which I name *Ljósálfar*. Those who are slain my sword or by the earth shall ascend into *Ljósálfar*, my Elves of Light.

“*All Father* kept Noaak in mind, along with all precious cargo within the ship; the Fauns and the Wood Gnomes, the Gargoyles, Kongeørn (eagle people) and the Uglafolk (owl people later known as the Uilvolk), the Wolfevolk (wolf people) and the dragons, the wildlife and livestock that were with him in the ark. God's Spirit moved across Midgard, causing the flood waters to subside and the ocean to return to its place. The water sources from the ocean depths were blocked and the floodgates of the heavens closed. Thus, the flood waters steadily receded, diminishing completely by the end of the one hundred and fifty days. There was no more Lemuria, for it had been rent asunder and torn apart into five great new masses of land, surrounded by new oceans. The crashing together of the great masses of land pushed up massive new mountains of great height, towering high fells the like of which had never been seen, and thus the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat on the seventeenth day of the seventh month. The flood water continued to recede until the tenth month, when, on the first of that month, the tops of the lower mountains could be seen. But not all waters receded, for such was the new climate that, frozen was the flood making great glaciers in the uttermost parts of the north and in the farthestmost parts of the south—into lands of forever ice. Lands, that even here in the third age are so cold that nothing can live save the yeti, the muskox, and the snow bear.

“Twas then that *All Father* took light and energy from the heavens and clean, holy soil of the ground, which had been washed clean of sin and shed blood, and with his hands did what he had said he would do, for humankind could not be trusted to preserve Midgard. So, he formed two Elves, male, and female, and breathed into them the Spirit of Life out of a ribbon of pure energy. The Elf he called *Yoshael*, the *Elf Mate* he called *Zakarah*. He nurtured their infant souls and clothed them with pure garments of Asgard, robes of light, creating them one rank lower than the Aesir, yet one step above men and all other sentient beings of Midgard. He taught them his laws and his statutes as well as the hidden secrets and mysteries of the universe, and all alchemy and sciences, and charged them, saying, ‘Go forth my Elf children, be fruitful and multiply. Make yourselves t nations of Elves—for from you both shall come forth a multitude, of holy nations—the twelve camps of the Elves. Protect the sons of Noaak and from them and raise up fellow guardians of Midgard. Guard always against the machinations of Loki, and against the Watchers and those who will usurp true magic and pervert it into sorcery. Fight all the sorcery which shall arise—this is your first and foremost task and in time, fight alongside those to whom I shall send and anointed one for the war of the binding of Loki”.

“Afterwards, though he be bound other Vanier and demigods will arise and these you and your descendants must fight. Carry through until the time appointed for judgment of all life, the time that I shall call Ragnarök. Teach humankind and all speaking creatures who I am, Yoshael, for you are Melchizideck, and Zakarah, thy soul mate and Priestess forever. From you Yoshael shall come the fountainhead of both *Prophecy* and *Wizardry*—which is true magic, and not the sorcery. Behold thou Yoshael, art my *White Wizard*, and from thee I shall build the *Order of the Sons of Light*—guardians of

Midgard. You are the High Priest of Midgard. And thou, my daughter Zakarah, are my holy *Spirit Maiden*, the *High Priestess of Midgard*, from who shall come my Circle of the Spirit Maidens—holy women, mages that I shall send unto thee from all races of men and beings of Midgard’.

“I perceive that you, my Elves, will not be alone in this task, for I am creating other new beings which, like you, are one rank above physical beings, yet one rank below my Aesirim’. Twas was then that *All Father* created the Unicorns from that very same unpolluted ground, and breathed into them the breath of life. They were great sentient horses coloured as white and pure as wind driven snow, and having great wings giving them a power of flight stronger than any bird. He gave them each a horn located on their foreheads of pure, glistening, polished ivory to represent the horn of salvation and deep, blue eyes to represent the deepness of spirit. He gave them the spirit of speech in the Holy Tongue—male and female created he them. The Unicorn he called Chi-i-Lin, and the Unicorness he called Qi-Lin, and created for them a mystical land far in the east—a magical forest called White Oaks”.

“That same day he created the tiny fairies to help the Elves, and set them to a kingdom called Eventyrland beneath a certain hill known as a Fairy Mound, cloaking its gateway with a spell of concealment to protect the Woodland Fairies from all who would seek their harm. In creating these Woodland Fairies, he made them, as it were, in the form of tiny Elves with dragon fly’s wings—human forms, the tallest of which was only six inches. Male and Female created he them—the Fairy he called Wyllim and the Fairy Mate he called Glynda. And so it was that *All Father* created the Guardians of Midgard from the machinations of Loki the destroyer, for he would never bring another flood as

great as the one he had caused to remake Midgard and baptize it with water, for the next baptism would be with fire”.

Young Ragnar said to Skald Lothar”, Zakarah must have been very beautiful. And Unicorns and Fairies—were they truly real?” He replied, “Oh yes, Ragnar. She was indeed the most beautiful and the fairest of all the Elf women—and the only Elf ever given the ability to change the colour of her hair just by a mere thought. She was the love of King Yoshael’s life. The Unicorns and the Fairies are very real—but no one has seen them since the end of the second age and the fall of the Sons of Romulus in the west two hundred year ago—there are others in the east at Constantinople, once called Byzantium and of Byzantium in the elder years I have much to say”.

“But I digress Ragnar, for there is still more to tell concerning the flood and the Elves. In the six hundred and first year of Noaak's life, during the first month, the flood water began to evaporate from the land. Noach then removed the ark's cover and saw that the surface of the land was drying and by the twenty seventh day of the second month, the ground was dry. But the climate had changed and in both the north and far south, the water had frozen into massive sheets of ice. Glaciers were hundreds and hundreds of feet thick and thousands of miles across. Now there would be four seasons: winter and spring, summer, and fall.

“*All Father* spoke to Noaak saying, ‘It's time for you, your wife, your sons, and your sons' wives and the beings who are with you to leave the ark. Bring out with you every living creature—including the birds, animals, and everything that crawls on the ground, and the hatching Dragon’s eggs—so they may disperse throughout the land, be fruitful, and multiply throughout all Midgard’. When Noaak emerged from the Ark,

there before him stood Yoshael and Zakarah. Yoshael greeted him, saying, ‘Welcome to our new world, Noaak. I bless thee in the name of the Lord God Most High.’ Noaak smiled, ‘You are his Priest, the *Melchizideck*, of whom I was told to expect?’ ‘I am he’, replied the Elf. The Melchizedek brought out bread and wine, and blessed the wine, saying, ‘Blessed art thou oh Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.’”

“Then, as everyone watched, Yoshael raised the bread and they blessed God, saying, ‘Blessed art thou oh Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from Midgard.’ Then when he had broken it, and sprinkled it with salt, they all ate of it, and it was then that Noaak placed into the hands of Yoshael the *Scroll of the Prophet Enokh*, which he had preserved through the flood. This holy text is writing most sacred and inked in the runes of Asgard. Melchizedek blessed Noaak and said, ‘Noaak is blessed by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered you and your family and these beings, Roldan and his children, the Merwif in the Sea, and you Kongeørn and you Uilvolk, you Wood Gnomes and Gargoyles safely through the flood—from the old world to the new world, from death into life, and the *of the Prophet Enokh* into my hands.’”

“And it came to pass, when *All Father* smelled the pleasing aroma, he told himself, ‘I will never again curse the land because of men and beings—even though the inclinations of humans remain evil from youth— nor will I destroy every speaking creature or any of the animal again, as I’ve done. Never again, for as long as Midgard exists, will sowing and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night ever cease. But be warned, for Loki desires to twist created beings into new creatures by sorcery and science. Be warned oh ye men and ye

Elves for in time, a daughter of weakness among thy children Yoshael, and among thy seed after thee oh Noaak, shall be corrupted through the sorcery of Volundr and thus Ogres shall arise. And of the Wood Gnomes, weakness shall prevail and being transformed, Goblins shall arise and I will allow this for the fires of testing in order that my true sons may see where the path hate leads in order that they may see and perceive and that salvation shall come.”

“So Noaak, his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, Yoshael and Zakarah removed the dragon eggs and every animal, every crawling thing; every bird and everything that moved on the earth emerged from the ark in groups, and thus a brave new world was born. Many beings now which shared the world with humankind; the Gargoyles, Huginn’s Folk, Wood Gnomes, Satyrs, Fauns, Wolfemenschen and the Changelings—as well the Centaurs and the Minotaurs, the Cyclopes, Merwif and the Trolls. Male and female, he had created these sentient beings, and he commanded them to go forth and multiply across the face of Midgard to build nations. Like men, some turned to evil and some turned to good. As *All Father* said, other denizens of doom were yet to come to test the world of men. Those were the foul Ogres of Morag—a mutated race of creatures made of men and elves; tortured and transformed by the hate of Loki and Volundr for all the good life that *All Father* in his wisdom had made. Thereafter Goblins, Ogres, and Gorgans would rise up and evil was their heart’s desire and thus mirrored the hearts of humankind”. “So, you, Ragnar, and all my people, sitting here with King Roderick in this noble Visigothic meadhall, what became of Noaak? It is written in the *Scroll of the Beginning* saying:

“*All Father* blessed all speaking creatures and ordered them, ‘Be productive, multiply and fill Midgard. All animals of

Midgard will be filled with fear and terror of you from now on, including all the birds of the sky, everything that crawls on the ground, and all the fish of the ocean. They've been assigned to live under your dominions. Every living, moving creature will be food for you. Just as I gave you green plants before, so now you have everything. However, you are not to eat meat with its life—that is, its blood—in it!

“Also, I will certainly demand an accounting regarding bloodshed, from every speaking creature, I'll demand an accounting for the life of another being. Whoever that amongst the sentient beings of Midgard commits murder; by a sentient being shall the blood of that murderer be shed—the killer is to be executed. Now, as for you all, be productive and multiply; spread out over the land and multiply throughout it. “Later, *All Father* told Noaak and his sons established a separate covenant with humankind saying, ‘Pay attention! I'm establishing a different covenant with you, and with your descendants after you, as well as those I made with the Elves and the speaking creatures that were with you. I will establish my covenant with you that no life forms will ever be cut off again by universal flood waters, and there will never again be a flood that destroys the entirety of Midgard. Here's the symbol that represents the covenant that I'm making between me and you for all future generations: I've set my rainbow in the sky to symbolize the covenant between myself and Midgard. Whenever I bring clouds over Midgard and the rainbow becomes visible in the clouds, I'll remember my promises and every sentient being and living creature, so that water will never again become a flood to destroy all living beings. When the rainbow is in the clouds, I will observe it and remember the everlasting covenant between me and all living beings across the face of Midgard’. This rainbow is the symbol of the pledge that I've established between me and

everything that lives on Midgard—for the next wrath will be that of fire and not of water as I told to your grandfather Enokh.”

“Noaak's sons who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Yapet and from these ancient ones the world of men was repopulated. Noaak lived three hundred and fifty years after the flood. In all, Noaak had lived a total of nine hundred and fifty years, and he died. So, young Ragnar, this is where the Elves, the Unicorns and the Woodland Fairies came from. Oh, how we could use their wise council now in these troubled times, this third age in which we live. But let us not speak of our troubles now, my Visigothic family. Let me continue to tell thee of our ancestors, who lived in a time of Wizards and Kings—in that Legendary First Age of Midgard!”

CHAPTER I

Lilith

From the Skald's Tale:

Far away to the west, in the land of vicious vaunted Vandalia, Avoiding the cities of their rather unfriendly and bellicose Vandal kinsfolk, Lord Raedwald, and his knights made Their way west towards great glorious Gergovia. These Ridaran Knew nothing of the outcome of the summer War, and, now the and the remaining six looked across The broad expanse of The River Gaut, knowing that they Must Cross it here or maybe There. Through a land of Forests, And, strange forest people, and the land of the Wyvern strode they. having never been that way before. Twas most fortunate that a few passing less vicious Vaunted Vandals had told them what strange lands that They must pass through to get to Gergovia; lands of Creatures of Legend, the woodland Fauns. Gergovia, so Golden grand It was in the elder years- - twas said to be The greatest of all Celtic cities of the west. These great-Gallant Gepids Ne'er Travelled so far, a westward Wandering, nor had they Ever Conceived in their Westering questing to legendary Celtic Gergovia— Meadhall of the Bear Queen They would go, a white Wizenen wizard there to find.



Lilith

Raedwald and his knights were planning how they would cross this wide river. “We’ll go south and see if there is a place shallow enough to ford, or at least swim it”. They really loved the land which they were now in. “This is good land, I say”, said Raedwald to his men, as they sat on their horses beside the water, looking across the great river to the opposite shore. “I had dream, Gunthar. I dreamed last night that all our people would pass through here someday—and then go across the Oster Sea in ships”. The men laughed and Gunthar replied, “You are crazy, my lord. Why would our people want to leave the steppes and come here? There, we have the mammoth and the mastodon; elk and deer abound and one can see for miles in every direction. This is a land of trees and shadows, and evokes fear. It is too close to Myrkvidr for my tastes says I.” Raedwald replied, with a smile, “Old friend, we have nothing to fear but fear itself”.

It was now the *seventh day of Hærfest-mōnaþ (Harvest Month) Tvi-mánuðr and Haust-mánuðr, in the five hundred and ninety second year of the first age of Midgard*, and little did they know that a game of demons was afoot, for suddenly from out of the sky came another Gargoyle attack. Twelve of the creatures came at them, and the fighting was fierce. Two more knights were slain, leaving Raedwald and Gunthar and, most fortunately, Hogni and Gunnar, who were brothers and the sons of the Scap Rolf, and his wife Grimhilde. Lord Raedwald and his men retreated into the wood line and held off the Gargoyle onslaught with a volley of arrows. Soon, the devils retreated, and it was apparent why. A great Luftdrakkon (flying dragon) appeared overhead, and swooped into the Gargoyle formation. The reptilians were forced away in short order, and some of them were carried away; screaming, knowing that they were to be fed alive to nestlings in some terrible rookery. “Further into the forest m’lads, before the Flugsaurier’s mate comes!” cried Raedwald.

Twas then that the knights found themselves in an even greater peril. A short white dragon charged at them from deep within the mossy and dark forest. It stood about six feet tall and had a long tail with spikes on the end. On its back were two wings, and its neck was long and snake-like. It had a familiar dragon's head with two horns protruding from the top. Its legs were lizard-like and it had two arms with hands resembling the claws of a giant running dragon or King Lizard, known to the Gomerians as an *Eshenbeck Dragon*. "Crikey, it's a bloody Wyvern!" shouted Gunnar.

The reptile came at them, and attacked one of the horses of the slain warriors. The men shot arrows at the Wyvern, attempting to save the horse. The wyvern roared, and with a mighty breath, fire issued forth from its nose. The flames set the forest ablaze, forcing the warriors to retreat, leaving the Wyvern to consume his pray. "We will have to come back to bury our dead! Let's get out of here—on the double lads!" ordered Lord Raedwald. They prompted their horses and away they rode, with the remaining steeds running close behind them in a near panic over the sudden turn of events. "What was it you were saying, my friend?" asked Gunthar. "We have nothing to fear but fear itself? I would say that a forest of Wyverns is something to fear". Raedwald replied as they rode headlong up an unknown forest trail. "It is still true, lads". Gunthar smiled, "Tell that to the horse".

The knights found a safe, and defendable clearing and made camp for the night. The forest-fire had been blown north by the winds of Vandalia and was no longer a threat. The place that Raedwald chose had a great fallen tree and was near a small clattering brook.

"Our fire will keep away the Wyverns, or any other beast wishing to attack us", said Gunthar. At that moment, they heard a great, great roar bellow through the woods. Fear filled the eyes of them all, and Hogni asked, "What in the name of Wotan was

that?” The roar came again and Raedwald replied, “It sounds like a sabre-toothed tiger. We must be on our guard against it. What a lively forest this is”. Just then, they heard movement in the forest to their left. With swords in hand, they spun to meet the challenge. “Whatever it is, it’s moving slow”, whispered Gunnar. The creature stopped moving, and they could hear a bit of sniffing. Then, once more, it moved their way. What they saw was a giant ground sloth; a huge rodent the size of a small mammoth, resembling both a bear and a ground squirrel. It had a long tail, long arms, and a long nose. It looked at the men and then continued its way.

“Stand down men; it is nothing but a young *Megathar*. They eat plants, not meat. Let’s make camp. I will take the first watch of the night. Next will be you, Hogni, and then Gunnar, and finally you Gunthar. You may be right about this place after all. Tomorrow we bury our dead and cross the river. We must go south to the land of Vindelicia, to a city called *Manching*. Priestess Byrnhilda said that these are the people of Dithranti—Celts, she called them. They’ll know how to find Gergovia and Dithranti”.

The knights were nearing the end of their rations of dried meat, and so twas only a light and simple meal for supper. They soon had a nice warm fire going, and the horses were tethered close at hand. Lord Raedwald took the first watch as he had said, and his men rolled up in their sleeping bundles and were soon sound asleep, for it had been a very big day indeed, especially since they had lost more comrades—men who were now singing and drinking mead in Valhalla.

The sun was well gone and the sky was filled with stars. As Lord Raedwald looked at them, it was as if he could reach out and touch them. He saw a shooting star and absorbed the beauty of it, wondering just what the stars really were. Then he thought of his wife Glynda and their daughter, three-year-old Signy. He saw her tiny little freckled face and heard her laughter, and

remembered how he used to pick her up and dance with her around the room of their home in Thorstadt. Little Signy his pride and joy; and Glynda his beloved soul mate.

An hour or so passed and, as he looked, there stood a woman just at the edge of camp in the firelight. She had long blond hair, and was scantily clad, and stood about five feet, and four inches tall. She held her hand out to him, and said in a seductive voice, “May I come to you, my lord, and share the warmth of your fire? I am lost, and the air is chilly”. Raedwald stood up, and tried to wake the men but they were in a sleep so deep that even kicking them did no good. “What sorcery is this”! exclaimed Raedwald. She walked into the camp and as his eyes met hers, twas as if he were in a trance. She came to him saying seductively, “Come with me in the forest, my lord. I am Lilith, and my sisters Morrigan, and Nemain wait for us”. She was immensely attractive, and he couldn’t help but be fixated by her muscular body, and if the two other sisters looked, and sounded as Lilith did, then surely passions would soon burn brighter than the campfire.

The thought of being in this strange beauty’s arms began to overtake him. His heart began to race, and there was fire in the pit of his stomach, but it was then that he noticed that she had a furry tail just above her rear end, and he knew that this was no woman at all, but a Jotunn. The mention of the name Morrigan, which had at first missed his attention, now raised his ire. This was a Huldra! He had been well warned by Priestess Byrnhilda that any who fell into the embrace of a Huldra would be bitten, drained of blood, and killed; only to rise again as a *draug*—a blood sucking vampire, or sometimes a barrow wight. Byrnhilda said that they existed not only in Myrkvidr, but also in the lands through which he, and his knights must travel—especially since there was a spiritual dimension to the war in which they were involved, and Adawulf Hister Carpathia would stop at nothing in his mad quest for world conquest. And Morrigan? Now he

remembered that she was known as the Phantom Queen. She was associated with war, and fate, especially with foretelling doom, death, or victory in battle. In this role she was said to appear sometimes as a raven. Morrigan, according to what he knew, incited warriors to battle, and could even help bring about victory over their enemies—but with a terrible price. The Morrígan encouraged knights to do brave deeds, strikes fear into their enemies, and sometimes she appeared as an apparition washing the bloodstained clothes of those fated to die. Some so her as a goddess of battle and war—but always with the price of the warrior's soul, which is sent into Niflheim for her master Sifjar, to be frozen in ice. He knew nothing of Nemain.

Raedwald closed his eyes and saw his beloved wife Glynda. He remembered their marriage vows in the old meadhall, before the war, and he remembered the birth of their daughter Signy. He saw the flaming red hair of his little bairn and remembered how he had held her in his arms on the day he had departed on this quest, and how she cried on his shoulder, saying, “Dah, don't leave me”. He remembered that his beloved Glynda was due another child. He pushed the Huldra away, saying, “I am pledged to a true woman, and will not betray her and nor will I fall into the clutches of Morrigan or Nemain! Begone Lilith! Go tell your sisters that Raedwald is a pure man! This quest will not fail, Huldra, and your charms and those of your sisters, will never match the passions and the love of my wife! Be gone with you, witch!” She laughed, “Before this is over, I and my sisters will have you, and all these men! Dithranti, and the Sons of Light will not be able to assist your people any longer, Raedwald of Gepidae!” She vanished in a flash of light, and Raedwald was able to wake the men. “Beware, lads, for the Huldra came to me and wanted to lay with me. I did not betray my family. She and her sisters may come to all of us, and we must remember our vows of purity when this quest started. If we fail, the Slaughter-Wolves will win, and those who survive will share the fate of the Gutthiuda”.

“A Huldra, here?” asked Sir Hogni. “Yes”, replied Lord Raedwald. “The Huldra lures men into the forest, rewarding those who satisfy her, and often killing those who do not, turning them into a draug. They can lure a man into the Underworld, and I’ve no desire to spend the next life as a barrow wight. Huldras steal human infants, and replace them with their own ugly huldrebairn, or changeling huldre kinder. In some cases, when the union results in a child, and when it is presented to the father, she forces him to marry her, and they say the child becomes a moon hound or a giant, cursed to wander Myrkvidr in search of blood. This one was named Lilith, and she has two sisters, Morrigan, and Nemain. If this happens to us our quest will fail. So, if the creature comes to any of you, rebuke the wench or suffer the fate of the Draugr (Vampires). Hogni, take the watch while we sleep, and wake the next man after the sixth turn of the hour glass”

Lilith did not return that night, and her sisters were never seen so Gunthar rolled out the rest of the knights at sunrise. They packed up the camp and returned to the sight of yesterday’s violence. The horse had been devoured by the reptile and they were greatly relieved to discover that the bodies of the three warriors were untouched by any animal. They spent the morning gathering wood for their funeral pyres, and by noon the fires blazed hot and Wotan welcomed their souls into Valhalla, the halls of the honoured dead.

The season was moving along and Raedwald knew that they must make it to Manching before winter set in. How far it would be from the River Gaut to Gergovia he knew not. The Quest Warriors followed the Gaut upstream and found a place where they could swim from sand bar to sand bar. Thus, doing so, they made it across the great flood by the evening and built a hot fire to dry out all their clothing. They could hear the howling of wolves and the roar of wyverns and sabre-toothed tigers and

were beginning to have a low opinion of these lands, to say the least.

CHAPTER II