



Your quest begins...

*Y*ou are the eldest offspring of the Grand and Exalted Emperor Soltan of Lantavia, and your father's rightful heir. Unfortunately your scheming younger brother, Prince Balnard, through cunning and deception, has insinuated his way into consideration for the throne. Your father, kind and righteous in his intentions, has been unable to see through Balnard's facade. He cannot think ill of his own child. Being a fair and concerned ruler, your father desperately desires the most honorable and capable successor. Night after night he wrestles with his decision. Which of his children should ascend to the throne?

One evening, your father summons you and your brother to his private chamber. As you and Balnard enter the room, you notice things are slightly different. Your father has laid out a small table in the center of the room, and on the table are three simple items: a bottle of wine, a loaf of bread and a silver chalice from the castle's fine collection.

"Ah, come in, my children," your father calls from behind the table. "Sit down here beside me. I have something to tell you that I'm sure will interest you both." 🍷

*Y*ou will recall," he continues, "the life of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and how He, on a night quite like

this one, gathered in an upper chamber with His followers as you and I are here tonight. At that meeting they shared refreshments much like you see before you. Jesus broke the bread, poured the wine into the cup and said words of consecration over the meal." Your father, in turn, then performs each of these actions.

"Through the years that cup has been lost," he says, "but I am certain that it still exists. It has been said that the person who possesses the Holy Grail will wield great power. Such power, my children, could be used to eliminate suffering and bring joy to Lantavia, if wielded by a just and honorable ruler. In the hands of the wrong person, I shudder to think what dread might befall us. I charge you both to go into the world and seek out this Holy Grail. When you have this magical treasure, return to me and claim your position as my heir. For I tell you that the people of this empire deserve only the very best we can give them."

The next morning, before departing the castle, you think about your father's words and their implications. Although only a scholar with scant desire for the trappings of power, you know full well the evil that awaits the empire should you fail and your brother succeed. You are determined to emerge victorious. Balnard evokes stark terror in the hearts of the people. On the throne he would be a tyrant, and an age of suffering and persecution, the likes of which has never been seen, would befall the empire of Lantavia. As you also know from a lifetime of sibling oppression at Balnard's hands, he will use any means at his disposal, foul or fair, to unearth the prize before you do.

Therefore, you decide to pay a farewell visit to your kindly mentor, Hocuspo, the castle's aged soothsayer, and ask him for a magical amulet to ward off dangers on the journey ahead. Instead, he gives you something far more powerful than magic—the wisdom of the ancients, sealed into an envelope. As he hands you the

envelope, he says, "When you are mightily perplexed and thoroughly frustrated by the events around you, these wisdoms will provide you with solace and help. Use them wisely," he cautions, "and only when they are needed."

You press him for further details, or at least a clarifying homily, but to no avail. Seeing that Hocuspo has said all that he is going to say, you thank him for his somewhat nebulous farewell gift and take your leave. Filled with mixed emotions of confusion and fervor for the coming quest, you mount your pure white charger and ride off into the distance on the beginning of your search for wealth, fame and glory. ♡

*T*he years pass by. You search hither and yon. Your trek takes you to Mepalotan. To Rotamia. To the Misty Isles. Always you hear the same story. Yes, the Grail has been here and gone.

Always, you find that your wicked stepbrother has been there before you. No matter how fast you travel, no matter how hard you search, he seems to be always one step ahead.

Your spirits, which you struggle to shore up, flag badly. And with good cause. Your armor creaks. Your once proud charger limps from years of travel over rocky roads. You become lean and hard from a diet of daily combat and simple food. You are no longer a callow and unseasoned youth, but one well schooled in the often brutal ways of survival. You have been tested in battle against countless bands of roving outlaws. You have always defeated these outlaws, but the incessant battling has taken its toll of your spirit.

Worst of all, your searching thus far has been totally for naught. You have visited every backwater village in

the known world. You have talked to peasants and paupers, kings and princes. And still you are no closer to your goal than you were when you left home, lo those many years ago.

You now grow impatient, afraid that Balnard may have found what you cannot. Perhaps Hocuspo's wisdoms hold the key, but you dare not open them until you are sure they are needed. ♡

Then one dark night, you hear a plaintive cry for help. With no thought whatsoever for your personal safety, you ride straightaway to answer the call.

You find a lone Bishop under attack from a ruthless band of brigands. You draw your trusty sword and rush to the fight. You cut and slash with the strength of justice, and drive the evildoers away.

But you suffer terribly in the process. Your gallant white horse dies at your feet, his mighty heart shattered from the exhaustion of this last battle. And your sword, your only means of protection in these hostile lands, lies rent asunder on the dusty ground.

You attend to the Bishop who suffers from naught more than a badly bruised spirit.

The Bishop thanks you profusely and asks what mission brings you to a land so far from the boundaries of civilization.

You tell him about your years of struggle, your search for the fabled Holy Grail and how you must find it before your brother does.

The Bishop lays his hand upon your forehead. His eyes journey skyward and then close. "I sense in you the goodness of the ages," he says when his eyes once again open. "You have the proper courage and temperament to accomplish your difficult task, if only you persevere. You have saved my life, brave knight. I regret I have little

to give you in the way of material rewards, but I can impart to you these words which may prove even more valuable than the coin of the realm: Straight ahead, down this road, lies the Monarchy of Beronia. There, if you have your wits about you, and are stout of heart, you may well find that for which you so earnestly seek.

"Make haste, brave knight, in the pursuit of your adventure. Act wisely, and be kind to those who would be kind to you. Remember, in the Monarchy of Beronia, events progress in a most timely manner. Take advantage of circumstances whenever you can. I fear that if you should fail here, brave knight, someone not so kind as you will find the Grail and imperil us all. So search with every fiber of your being for the wondrous Holy Grail. You will never have another chance."

With that, the kindly Bishop takes his leave. ♡

With the Bishop's words fresh in your memory, you start down the road to the Monarchy of Beronia, unarmed and afoot, but imbued of a much renewed spirit. ♡

The Monarchy of Beronia...

*T*urmoil reigns in Beronia.

Robbers and thieves run rampant. A fire-snorting dragon burns all in its path. A fearsome black knight terrorizes the people.

Oh, woe, that such peril should exist in this kingdom, which for centuries has been an orderly and civilized monarchy. Who will protect the gentlefolk from the chaos in their midst?

The good citizens of Beronia look to their monarch and sworn protector, King Albana, for aid and comfort. But alas, the king responds with naught but gross indifference. ❧

*W*hat, you may ask, has happened to the king's knights? Why can they not aid the gentle Beronians? Unfortunately for the common folk, the knights of the realm greatly resent their king because of his callousness toward them. For example, hear ye the infamous tale of King Albana's boar hunt . . .

"I am afraid the mountain run-off will make this stream crossing a difficult one, sire," said one of the king's groomsmen. "But fear not. We carry in our royal baggage ample changes of kingly raiment."

"Nonsense," responded the king gruffly. "I will not be inconvenienced by wet apparel. One of my knights will



King Albana of Beronia

carry me across on his back. Now, which of you will volunteer?"

A brawny young knight stepped forward. "Let it be me, your royal highness. It will be my privilege to keep both thy person and thy finery from dampening in the stream."

"I commend your eagerness," responded the king. "If you are ready, then let us be across." ♡

Ah, too bad that the ambition of youth often exceeds experience and ability. The young knight forgot that the portly King Albana weighed a hefty 250 pounds.

Swaying precariously, rocking back and forth, the knight and his royal cargo entered the water. Caught up in the raging current, the knight swiftly lost his footing. In a flash, king and knight together tumbled headfirst into the icy stream.

As King Albana emerged from the waters, thoroughly soaked from royal head to toe, he bellowed loudly, "This is an outrage! If I cannot trust my loyal knights to perform even the simplest of tasks, then I am truly without champions in my own land. I hereby demote you, one and all, to the lowly status of palace guards!"

And so it came to be that the monarchy of Beronia lost its entire fighting force. ♡

King Albana's harsh and uncaring manner in dealing with his underlings and subjects has led to great dissension. The King's imperial manner has especially infuriated one of the most mysterious members of the realm . . . the Black Knight. This powerful and elusive warrior has taken the bold step of publicly proclaiming his contempt for the king.



The Black Knight

The Black Knight has drawn up a proclamation and nailed it to every signpost in Beronia:

"Whereas King Albana has foresworn his God-given ability to protect the people, to mete out basic justice and to provide for the fair trade of goods and services, he should relinquish his crown.

"This he must do, or suffer the indignity of removal by force."

Strong words, indeed, but to be expected from one such as the Black Knight. ♡

*N*o one knows the Black Knight's true identity. Instead of an heraldic coat of arms, his shield bears the mystical image of a glowing medallion carried on a winged horse. And what could that possibly mean?

The Black Knight is a soldier of mythic proportions. He has crossed lances with enemies both inside and outside the realm, and has always emerged victorious. More than one brave knight has dreamed of enhancing his own reputation by vanquishing the Black Knight. But so intimidating is his presence that most of these knights have fled in stark terror at nothing more than the sight of him seated high astride his trusty steed. Verily, his armor fairly glistens with an unworldly sheen. And his sword has a double edge of such razor sharpness that it can slice through the thickest tree trunk with a single stroke.

With the power to appear out of nowhere, as if borne on the wind, the Black Knight makes all in the kingdom tremble. At his approach, even the tiniest animals of the forest dash for the safety of caves and burrows.

The mere mention of the Black Knight's name causes King Albana to quake with fear. But not all have such



The Dragon of Beronia

a fear of this shadowy warrior. In truth, if you should encounter the Black Knight and be in need of aid, you may in fact find him more than willing to help. Then again, you may not. For who among us knows whether he be villain or hero? That may fall to you to discover. ♡

*T*he other truly terrifying presence in the Monarchy of Beronia is the foul dragon. It is a truly reprehensible monster; a huge, winged reptile with crested head, scales harder than granite and razor sharp talons. Noxious rivers of sulphurous flame belch continuously out of its massive mouth and turn all in its path to ashes.

This mean-spirited dragon's destructive nature has given rise to a drinking song which tipsy peasants belch when they've tippled one too many flagons of mead. It goes thusly:

What be that smell on the evening breeze?
It be The Dragon of Beronia burning trees.

A day's rations for this awesome beast typically consist of twelve cows, thirty sheep, a flock of chickens and a peasant or two for dessert.

Clerics who speak nary a cross word about any living being are hard pressed to find a kind thought for the wicked Dragon of Beronia. Even as we speak, the dragon roams freely about the countryside, imperiling the helpless villagers.

The king's men, demoted to naught but palace guards, cannot help. The people must look elsewhere, perhaps to you, mighty adventurer, for deliverance from this beast. But remember: In the Monarchy of Beronia, times they do change. Always proceed with extreme caution. For what is true today may not be true tomorrow.

Lest this tale of Beronia causes you to venture forward with only venom in your bosom, be advised: All is not



Princess Lorinda of Beronia

wickedness in this wondrous kingdom. Keep a kindness in your heart. Purity of spirit can be found in great abundance in the fair Princess Lorinda, only daughter of King Albana. ♡

Day in and day out, the lovely Princess Lorinda travels the length and breadth of the kingdom, doing good deeds for the downtrodden peasants. She brings them gifts of food and clothing. She has even sold all her precious jewelry to the village hocksmith, using the money to help the peasants pay her father's usurious taxes.

Troubadors have written entire ditties to the clarity of Lorinda's sky-blue eyes and to her angelic smile. Sing along with these minstrels as they recount Lorinda's virtues:

Fair Lorinda of the mist,
Walks through murky wood and knoll.
She brings the laughter and the mirth
That lifts a saddened soul.

Many knights have asked for her hand, but she refuses them all. Lorinda is a great reader of the gothic bards and their writings concerning matters of the heart. No one (save a commoner of whom her father would not approve) has thus far aroused in her the ringing of bells and the moving of Earth which the bards always predicted would accompany the appearance of a maiden's true love. ♡

Lorinda in her great wisdom has taught the children of the kingdom how to read. Thus they might enjoy the heartening pronunciations of the ancient prophet Claron who wrote extensively in his Book of Postula-

tions about the great knight who would someday arrive to save the Monarchy from doom.

The fair Lorinda travels throughout the kingdom with no one to minister to her save for one handmaiden. But she fears not, for many are her friends and few are her enemies.

Should you meet the princess on your travels, you will find her eager to help you in your quest. You may be able to reciprocate the favor, as well, and help her in some small way. Who knows? 🍷

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