



RUNES OF GALLIDON

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The Silent Baron - Lord Enzo

Maia Jacomus

a short story set in the world of Runes of Gallidon

Chieftan Fedot lit the last purple-glass lantern, then extinguished the flame on the incense stick, the fragrant musk smoke spiraling into the air. After lodging the incense stick in its burner and placing it on its proper shelf—making sure it sat parallel with the edge of the shelf—he went to the doorway, pulled aside the indigo curtain, and told the Sentries flanking the entry, “All is prepared. Admit no one but the Shamanair.”

“Understood,” was their trained reply.

The Chieftan straightened the stiff white collar of his robe and scanned the room again, seeing that everything was in place. It was a small room, large enough for perhaps three people. The lantern glow enriched the purple grain of the dark, ashen-grey wood that surrounded him. Aside from the few shelves arranged symmetrically on either side of the doorway, the only other items in the room were a black selkie-fur blanket, a bottle of violet die, and a vial of lotus oil. No lantern was unlit, no item was askew. It was perfect, but for the absence of the Shamanair.

As Chieftan Fedot ran a finger through his beard to smooth a tangle, he heard his name.

Turning, he saw a gloved hand pulling back the curtain.

“No one may *enter!*” Fedot snapped at the Sentry. “None but the Shamanair! The ceremony is a hallowed and—”

“A message arrived for you, sir.” Seeing that the Chieftan was about to protest again, the Sentry added, “An *urgent* message, sir.”

With unveiled annoyance, Chieftan Fedot snatched the scroll and unrolled it. While he first glanced dismissively along the first line, something caught his eye. “But this is from the Shamanair!” He read on with intense concentration, his face becoming increasingly contorted with disgust. “What is this? ‘I must refuse the position granted me’?! This is unacceptable, he has not the liberty to refuse!”

“It seems evident that he must,” a Sentry muttered.

The Chieftan walked around to face him. “You read my message?”

“I had to validate the importance of the message to be sure it merited your attention at this crucial time.”

“Well put,” the other Sentry commended him.

Chieftan Fedot gave each man a serious, silent reprimand and reluctantly unfurled the paper again to read the rest of the message. “I cannot leave Adal Berat, for the sake of its safety...”



A young man of seventeen years sat in stone silence, his long black hair drawn back loosely with a band of twine. His legs were folded, his hands resting lightly on his knees. The Kaday rune tattoo showed clearly on his wrist, as it did on the wrist of his instructor sitting opposite him.

While the Stretch of Shadow was naturally dark, every window and crevice of the room had been covered to produce perfect darkness—all except for a single lit candle in the center of the floor between them. Despite the stillness and emptiness of the room, the flame flickered. The pupil tried not

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to notice the dancing light, concentrating instead on his other senses. However, when the flap of the door was suddenly pulled aside, shedding light into the room, he flinched. He could hear his instructor rise and cross to the entry. For a minute, all he could hear was the crinkle of paper.

“Lord Enzo, I must dismiss you early,” Master Inna told her pupil. “There is another matter that requires my attention.”

At first, Enzo remained as he was, determined to do another full hour whether his instructor was present or not. But the nervous anxiety in her tone told him there was something more important happening than steady study, and he felt compelled to find out what it was. Enzo approached his instructor, and she handed him the message before leaving. Standing in the light of the doorway, he read:

*Prepare yourselves
Assemble all adepts of Kaday
Spirits causing destruction by wood rot
Eight villages struck within three weeks
Two dead, fifteen injured
Prevention possible only through Spirit Mastery
Shamaness Yeva consents to the use of Spirit control
in this instance of severe threat
without consequence of the law*

Enzo stepped outside and found Master Inna already halfway to the center of town. Pocketing the message, he followed along the boardwalk to the watchtower. Looking up, he could see his instructor standing atop the watchtower’s platform, arms outstretched and gently waving through the air, trying to detect the presence of any Spirits. Enzo waited at the foot of the ladder until she finished her search and climbed down.

“There seem to be none nearby,” she told him, “but I think we must expect their arrival. I will make camp atop the watch tower. But first, I need to barter for provisions. Lord Enzo, take this post until I return. I will keep a Sentry down here. If you sense the approach of a Spirit, drop the coil of rope kept on the upmost rail, and the Sentry will know to fetch me.”

Enzo nodded and climbed the ladder to the top of the tower. With each rung, he could feel his breath grow more shallow, making it easier to feel his heart beat at the base of his throat. But he forced his hand to reach up for the next rung to bring him closer to the top. As he passed the halfway point, he could feel heat wash over his face and leave behind a numbing chill. Just as he was blinking away patches of black, his palm hit the surface of the top platform. Summoning a deep breath, he pulled himself up the rest of the way, feeling the solid wooden planks beneath his hands and knees. As he regained clear vision, he sat himself against a corner and closed his eyes, taking slow, soothing breaths to revert to a meditative state. In place of the dancing flame serving as a distraction was the sensation of the tower swaying, though he knew full well it was firm and still.

When Master Inna returned to the top of the watchtower with a pack of provisions over her shoulder, she found Enzo slumped back against the corner, eyes closed. His posture was too slack to be meditative. Inna knelt, tapped his cheek. “Lord Enzo! *Enzo!*”

Enzo’s eyes slowly blinked open, and he gently shook his head, gripping it with his fingertips.

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“Are you unwell?” his instructor asked.

Enzo pointed up until his hand was above his head, then leveled his palm. Then he waved his hands in front of him with a shake of head.

Master Inna nodded and rubbed his back to comfort him. “I’m here now, so you can go back down.”

He scoffed and shrugged his shoulders.

“Take your time. Just back into the ladder and don’t look down.”

Enzo covered his face with his hands and exhaled forcefully. Waving a hand in assent, he crawled backward, his foot feeling out the edge of the tower platform until it was secure on the first rung. As he descended, he tried to concentrate on the sight of the tower wall in front of his face and on the sensation of the ladder rung pressed against the ball of his foot. He barely drew breath until he felt the smooth boardwalk planking beneath his foot, then sat on the floor a moment to collect himself.

“Hey, Enzo, there you are!”

The familiar voice of his half-brother seemed to echo in his ears until his mind cleared to stability. He slowly rose and turned to see Gerosim running toward him.

“Your summons was just delivered to the house,” he said, handing a paper card to Enzo. “You have to be at the Shadowcast in Alkat the exact day and hour of your birth. Sire’s already gone to the pier to make arrangements. You’ll have to leave the day after tomorrow.”

Enzo held out his hand and bowed his head, then accepted the card to read it.

“Ready or not, eh?”

Enzo shrugged and swept his hand over his head.

“What do you mean, you don’t care? I thought by now, and with all your training, you’d feel differently about it.”

Enzo pantomimed setting something on his head, then again swept his hand over his head.

“Huh. Well, I think it’d be great to be in charge. And if I were just a year younger than you instead of older, I would have gotten the chance.”

Enzo pantomimed taking something off his head and presenting it to Gerosim.

Gerosim chuckled slightly and started walking, saying, “No, no, it’s yours. You can’t give it up, anyway. And besides, you’ll do a great job. I really can’t think of anyone better, especially when it comes to Spirit Mastery.” Enzo followed as they walked along the boardwalk toward their neighborhood. “I think our generation’s failed at it, for the most part. Like Kir and all his delusions about getting that storm to stop by talking to the Spirits. Then again, he probably can’t even spell ‘coincidence,’ much less understand what it means.”

Enzo knocked his fist to his head, indicated “one” with his finger, then cross-sliced his hands in front of him.

Gerosim laughed and replied, “Yeah, one too many dives off the pier in the shallow season.”

Gerosim assumed a serious tone and asked in a low voice, “But are you going to keep up this oath of silence thing once you’re Shaman? Is that really a good idea?”

Enzo shrugged, then bent up both his arms in front of him with fisted hands and thrust his elbows down.

“Well, I guess it might be best for the Spirits, but what about the meetings with the Chieftans? What then? And, you know, you still never told me how the oath started in the first place.”

Enzo just shook his head and waved a dismissive hand.

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“Yeah, I know, it’s never my business. Because it’s not strange at all for a twelve-year-old to suddenly take an oath of silence. Which, by the way, it is. Really strange.” He scoffed. “You were always a little strange, though. Well, different, anyway. You laugh for the oddest reasons. I once saw you crack up over a duck following a turtle.”

Enzo seemed to try to explain the humor, but gave up and shrugged with a smirk.

Gerosim shook his head with a wry smile. “And your laugh was just the most offensive thing my ears had ever...it was like a, like an alligator trying to bark like a sea lion.”

Enzo laughed—silently, but with his shoulders shaking and a crooked grin.

Gerosim snorted and nudged him with his elbow. “I think I miss it. You’re so boring now.”

Crossing the private boardwalk into the Noble neighborhood, the Baroness Alyona estate sat on the fork to the right. Columns the size of aged trees were necessary to support the manor’s weight above the water level. It was four tiers in height, with an attached cottage for the servants. Every inch of the pale wood was engraved with depictions of the family’s ancestors and their legacies. Reflective lanterns hung from the soffits between each tier, refracting and collecting what little light existed in the marsh air so that they glowed without flames. The most definitive mark of the noble estate was the multi-colored stone tile that shingled the soffits and the roof, and copper plating on the corner edges of each tier, much of it green with age.

The half-brothers were admitted by the Sentry, who held the door open for them. Enzo walked toward the stairs, but Gerosim hailed him down.

“Wait a minute!” he called. “I was thinking, since you’re leaving soon, maybe we should double your physical combat training. Of course, it’s impossible to distill all my remaining expertise into even two or three hours for two or three days, but we can try. What do you think?”

Without hesitation, Enzo descended the stairs to join his half-brother in the training room.

At dinner that evening, Gerosim and Enzo stood at their seats, awaiting the Baroness’s arrival to the table. Baroness Alyona breezed into the dining hall with Enzo’s father, Lazar, on her arm. They stood behind their designated chairs and bowed their heads.

“Our thanks to Na’naat,” the Baroness recited, “for granting us life and honor in this world, where all we lack is our Emperor, for whose return we wait in hope.”

Everyone concluded with, “Our thanks.”

No one was to take their seat until the Baroness did, and she made no such move. She instead looked between her two sons—the elder with a burn across his cheek, and the younger with a bruise along the side of his jaw. “I assume you have not been quarreling,” she said, “as I very clearly forbade it.”

“We haven’t been ‘quarreling’, Dam,” Gerosim said. Enzo shook his head to emphasize the rebuttal.

When she heard no other explanation, she said, “No one shall sit until I hear the truth of it.”

“We were training, Dam, sparring,” Gerosim insisted.

Enzo put his palms together, then spread them apart. Then he held out his hands in front of him, one in front of the other, moved the front hand over and behind the other. He then put a hand to his chest, then moved it out and across to the side.

“I do understand, Enzo dearest,” Alyona said, “but I wish you would remember that I prefer for you to use writing tools while at the dinner table. I hope you intend to write when you become Shaman. No one in Alkat will understand you half so well as we do.”

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Alyona sat, allowing everyone else to sit and be served their dinner. “I am sure you know, Enzo, that I do respect your oath, whatever your motive for it. It shows patience and commitment. However, the constant use of such extravagant gestures becomes undignified. As Shaman, you need to present yourself with the utmost dignity and elicit the respect appropriate to your position.”

While she looked down at her food to cut it, Enzo swept his hand over his head, after which he heard a stifled laugh from Gerosim.

Without looking up, the Baroness stated, “Just because I cannot hear you, Enzo, does not mean I do not know what you are saying.”

Lord Lazar changed the subject. “I reserved a house boat for us all.”

“We’re *all* going?” Gerosim asked. “I thought the ceremony was private and secret and all that.”

“It is,” the Baroness replied, “but we will be outside the Shadowcast as it happens, so when it ends, we shall be the first to congratulate him.” She cast a warm smile on Enzo.

“Afterwards,” Lazar continued, “we can have a celebratory feast. I sent word ahead to the best dining hall in the vicinity.”

Gerosim nodded. “I like that plan. Certainly better than my plans to stay here and do the same thing I always do.” He then grinned impishly and added, “And I’ve heard that Alkat women...” A firm scold emanating from his mother’s eyes prevented him from revealing the rest.

When the meal finished, the Baroness rose, followed quickly by everyone else, and they all filed orderly from the room. As they separated for their own evening routines, Lazar remained behind with Enzo. He simply beamed a smile and embraced his son with a hearty pat on the back. Then, leaning back to look his son in the eyes, his smile diminished into something bittersweet, and he left to commence his usual tasks.

Enzo did not even attempt to sleep that night. He lay in his bed with his hands behind his head, staring up at the ceiling. Occasionally, his eyes swept across his room or watched the curtains flutter in the night breeze. For once, he tried to shut down his connection to any nearby Spirits, and tried only to focus on his own thoughts. He had considered his impending life as a Shaman many times before, and never really considered it to be a difficult profession. He would regard the advice given by his council of Chieftans and based on that, would make decisions. It seemed simple enough. What worried him were the Spirits—they were powerful and unpredictable, and he would be relied upon to be the link between them and the people, to attempt to bring peace between them. He could hear the Spirits well enough, but they never had any interest in listening to him. And the one time they did...

Gerosim still glared at him every time they walked by the pier where his prized kayak used to be docked. And the outside corner of Enzo’s left eyebrow never grew back. He used to shave the other to match, but stopped caring after awhile.

As his gaze wandered to the wardrobe across the room, he noticed with mild curiosity that it only looked level when he tilted his head slightly to the right. Sitting up, he wondered if the darkness was playing tricks on his eyes. The wardrobe looked crooked, and yet all its legs looked even. Tossing the blanket aside, he slid off the bed and crossed the room to get a better look but halted halfway there. He could feel more weight on his left leg, even though he did not seem to be leaning.

Then he heard a yawning creak.

Moving to the window, he pulled back the curtain to look outside. Unable to see well enough through the midnight darkness, he tried to clear his mind to alert his other senses. He could hear some faint snapping and cracking—and laughter. Carefree, bubbly laughter with a soft echo. It was a Spirit.

He got a paper and pencil from his desk, scrawled a message, then darted across the hall and into Gerosim's room. Hoisting his half-brother's shoulders up from the bed, he shook them until he woke.

"*What?*" Gerosim snapped, squinting his eyes open. When the blur of sleep finally cleared from his eyes, he could see Enzo's stern eyes, taut mouth, and raised eyebrows. "Oh, kren, I know that look. What is it now?"

Enzo pulled him out of bed and handed him the message:

a spirit is rotting the supports beneath the house

"Feral-kren! Are you sure? No, I know you are. Take this back and use it to get the servants out—I'll get Dam and Sire."

He jumped out of bed and ran for the door, but Enzo stopped him with a hand on his shoulder.

"*What?* Oh." Gerosim ran to his wardrobe to stumble into a pair of trousers.

Enzo ran out the door, down the hall, and down the stairs. When he reached the bridge connecting the servants' cottage to the manor, he slid to a halt—the boardwalk snapped in half with a lightning-strike crack, waking all the servants within. They gathered at the windows and door to see what the noise was, and as the stilts of their cottage started to sway, they began frantically searching for escape. With no other ideas coming in the little time he had to think, Enzo plunged into the water below. He then climbed onto the floating piece of boardwalk and signaled up to the servants to follow suit. They had their doubts and fears at first, edging near the side, then backing hurriedly away, but soon enough began dropping one by one into the water below. Enzo reached out to make sure they could climb aboard the floating debris.

The creaking grew loud as the cottage began to collapse. Enzo pulled the youngest child of the butler's onto the makeshift raft, and with a wave, commanded everyone to use their arms to row. With their number, they were able to make a swift retreat, but not fast enough to evade one of the stilts toppling down on the corner of the raft. The servants were thrown; most were able to hang onto the railing, but two were tossed into the water. Lying back against the raft, Enzo thrust the sole of his foot at the stilt, cutting himself on a raised knot in the wood. One more kick, and the stilt was pushed off and into the water, freeing their raft. The servants rescued the two in the water while Enzo winced at the slice in the bottom of his foot, splashing it into the water to wash it.

As with a wail of distress the manor itself collapsed into the water below, the waves it created upon impact shoving the raft farther along. Everyone dropped their rowing duties to cling on for life as it soared across the water and collided with the stilts of another boardwalk. With a little steering, they were able to reach the ladder and climb up to the solid, steady planking.

Enzo's parents and Gerosim were nowhere in sight. Enzo ushered the servants in the safer direction while he went the opposite way, toward the wreckage. He could still hear the laughter—it was working on his neighbor's house now. Positioning himself between the houses, he sat down cross-legged and closed his eyes. He tried to numb the sting in his foot and deafen the creaks and cracks of destruction as he cleared his mind, concentrating only on the laughter. As it began to echo off every corner of his mind, building so loud as to nearly give him a headache, he slowly opened his eyes. He could see something swirling around a support beam beneath the neighbor's manor. It looked to him like a cloud of metallic silver, buzzing gnats. With more focus, he could have seen her more clearly, but he wanted to focus instead on communication. He pictured the letters emblazoned in the air, trying to force

them onto the Spirit.

One corner of the manor dropped, pulling with it a section of the boardwalk he sat on. He tried not to feel as the boardwalk lurched downward, then snapped and jumped back—it broke, but his section was safe, for now.

The letters disintegrated from his focus, replaced instead with the image of his home crashing down, his family nowhere to be seen in the night darkness. As soon as he felt the urgency and anxiety coursing through him, he breathed deeply to collect it all together, then forced it all into one thought: *Stop!* He could almost hear it echo, though he did not say it aloud.

Looking up, Enzo saw the silver cloud above him. The whole picture was still not clear, but he could hear something, like wind blowing through a hollow log, with starts and stops, rises and falls. Though he could not understand every word, he gleaned an overall feeling of spite. The Spirit then darted once again for the manor, laughing as it spun around a stilt.

With his eyes shut to build focus, Enzo rose onto his feet, his hands limp up at his sides. He could feel his muscles tense in his brow and his arms with the stress of intense focus and concentration as he could envision the Spirit in his mind. Without even realizing it, his arms lifted higher and reached out in front of him, his fingers curling to grasp the air. His mind began to burn, his temples pulsating, his ears beating, and his hands began to shake. Finally, his fingers snapped shut into fists, and he pulled them inward.

The laughter silenced.

He reached forward, then pulled again. He could feel the Spirit coming closer; he could almost physically feel the telepathic binds that held her in his fists. However, the closer he pulled her, the weaker his grip became until it slipped.

Blinking his eyes open, he knew he lost control. But he could see the Spirit more clearly now—and she was smiling. Her voice spilled out like water bubbling over a rocky brook, and he could understand her—at any rate, he knew what her words were. Why she said them, he had no idea.

“Enzo!”

Turning around, he could see a lantern waving in the night darkness. Following it brought him to Gerosim and his parents, who were safe with the servants. They were joined by several others who were wakened by the destruction, including Enzo’s instructor.

“What was all that?” Gerosim asked. “It stopped? Did it leave?”

Enzo drew his hands to his head, then joined them into a fist.

“Whatever...she. Did she leave?”

“Not quite...” Master Inna remarked. “She’s hovering over him right now.”

“*What?*”

“Is he alright?” Baroness Alyona asked. “What is happening?”

Master Inna smiled, then broke into a laugh. “It’s quite...unusual. Enzo’s control over her forced her to stop. But once his control broke...” She shook her head in disbelief. “The Spirit told Enzo that she likes him and will never leave his side.”

Baroness Alyona studied the expressions of the instructor and her pupil. “Is this some joke?”

Master Inna only laughed more. “No, I’m telling the complete truth. That’s what happened. Even now, I can feel a very strong aura of happiness and peace from the Spirit. I think...she admires him.”

“That’s...!” Gerosim stared at Enzo, who shrugged. “This is just strange. I’m going to get some sleep.” But before he left for the nearest inn, he quirked a grin and elbowed his half-brother.

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Baroness Alyona put her arm around her son Enzo, for a moment looking above him, where the Spirit was supposedly hovering. “I am glad you are well. Come, you need your rest, especially after this.”

As Enzo followed the others to the inn, he wondered with a streak of annoyance how he was supposed to fall asleep with a Spirit watching him.



As Shamaneir, I must refuse the position granted me. I cannot leave Adal Berat, for the sake of its safety. The Spirit Tu'enta has threatened to continue her rampages if I depart from Adal Berat. I give thanks to Gallidon for the honor of the position granted me, but I cannot accept it. I hope to some day find a compromise with Tu'enta, so that I may become a Chieftan and attend the mandatory council sessions held at Shadowcast. I apologize for the inconvenience this has caused.

Lord Enzo el'Adal Berat

Gerosim scoffed as he read over his half-brother's shoulder. “I can't believe you have to give up being Shaman because a Spirit has some fascination with you.”

Enzo swept his hand over his head.

“Really? This whole situation doesn't bother you at all?”

Onto a spare piece of paper, Enzo scrawled, *Shaman, no. Spirit stalker, yes.*

Fire from the candle leapt onto the paper, burning away the words he had just written. With a shake of his head, Enzo picked up his leather gloves from the desk shelf and swatted at the fire until it was out.

Gerosim raised his eyebrows with a wry smile and slapped Enzo on the back. “Well, good luck with that, brother.” He left Enzo alone with Tu'enta.

Enzo folded up the letter, then took off his signet ring to seal it with wax. As he held up the ring, the gold shining in the candle light, he sensed a surge of excitement from Tu'enta. He tossed it into the air, and she suspended it with a whirl of wind. Then, with echoing laughter, she tumbled it around like a child's toy ball, every once and again pausing to glide it near the candlelight.

From all this, Enzo began to form a theory.



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