



RUNES OF GALLIDON

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The Silent Baron - Chieftain Enzo

Maia Jacomus

a short story set in the world of Runes of Gallidon

Enzo scaled the stairs carved into the tree's massive trunk to the upper floor of the Shadowcast, where Shaman Yaromir and all the other chieftains were gathered, sitting in a circle on the floor. Through the dim lighting of the violet-glass lanterns, Enzo could see that all eyes were on him as he approached and took his seat.

"Late again, Chieftain Enzo," remarked Chieftain Terenti from across the room. He was always critical of the Silent Chieftain.

"Was it Tu'enta again?" Chieftain Pitir asked. His place was always beside Enzo in the circle, and he had long ago agreed to be his translator for the group.

Enzo nodded in reply to the question posed to him and took his place. Everyone knew Tu'enta wanted to follow him into the Shadowcast, and Enzo had a difficult time persuading her not to.

Chieftain Terenti snorted. "I have told you before that bribery is not an effective way to communicate with Spirits."

"It's no more bribery," Chieftain Pitir replied, "than giving your wife a gift before leaving for these meetings. It's tribute, not bribery."

Enzo winced. He scrawled something onto paper and handed it to Pitir, who read it.

"*She is not my wife.* Well, of course I didn't mean to say that."

Yaromir cleared his throat. "We will not waste another meeting discussing Tu'enta. I have already made it known I approve of Chieftain Enzo's dealings with the Spirit - she grants us good fortune as a result. And so it must be remembered, Chieftain Terenti, that no criticisms you give against him will have any bearing on his ability to be a part of this council, nor on his ability to administrate his city. If you once again turn my council into an adolescent debate, you will be banned from the meeting."

Chieftain Terenti's mouth sneered but remained shut.

Shaman Yaromir then said, "Now, this is our last meeting before the autumn floods. Are there any resource problems that need to be resolved?" Chieftain Vendrek bowed his head low. "I call on Chieftain Vendrek of Boyar."

Chieftain Vendrek raised his head and said, "We lost a large shipment of water jugs in a boating accident. We don't quite have enough for our citizens to fill for their household reservoir water."

"Does anyone have a surplus that can be supplied to Boyar?" Yaromir asked the council.

"We do," Chieftainess Wayda offered. "The same happened to us last year, so our potters and artisans began their autumn crafting schedule early this year. We should be able to make up the deficit."

"Thank you, Chieftainess. Chieftain Vendrek, do you have confidence in one of your own vessels, or should the Chieftainess send one from Temornik?"

"I would appreciate if the Chieftainess could send one. We could offer thatch mats in exchange."

"We have enough thatch mats," the Chieftainess replied. "Just provide enough provisions for the crew's return home, and we can call it fair."

“Are you agreed?” the Shaman asked.

“Agreed,” Chieftain Vendrek replied. “Thank you, Chieftainess.”

The Shaman then asked the whole council, “As you know, reservoir water is the most important resource for surviving the autumn floods. Does everyone have sufficient jugs and drinking water sources?” None spoke up or bowed their heads. Yaromir continued. “Also be sure to have all wells checked for safe drinking by the local Alchemists, and remind citizens to give the well shrines daily attention, so that our continued good relationship with the Spirits of our cities will continue to grant us good water from our wells.”



It was near the end of the two-week peak of the autumn season when the flood waters kept everyone homebound. Baroness Alyona had convinced her son Gerosim that, with a pregnant wife, it would be best to stay the two-week period at the family manor instead of at their cottage. Not only was Enzo glad for the time with his half-brother, he was also relieved to not be alone when, one after the other, their parents fell gravely ill. Gerosim, the stronger rower, was able to make it to the medicine chief’s home and convince her to brave the waters for a house call. Evidently, they were not the only ones to request her assistance.

Enzo sat in the hall outside his parents’ room while Gerosim paced. The medicine chief finally stepped out.

“So, what is it?” Gerosim demanded.

“As I expected, it is the same disease I have seen all these two weeks. A well in the Bazaar Square had been poisoned when a diseased swamp rat drowned in it. It seems by the time the Sentries had discovered it and closed the well off, a number of people had already drawn their reservoir water from it.”

“Bazaar Square?” Gerosim asked incredulously. He turned toward the other end of the hall and shouted, “*Abram!*”

The servant walked briskly down the hall toward them, his head bowed—he knew that tone well enough. “You called, sir?”

“You drew reservoir water from the bazaar square?”

“At the time, the neighborhood artisan well was overcrowded.”

“And you couldn’t wait for...” Gerosim scoffed. Then, with surprising volume, he roared at the servant, “You’re dismissed! Get out of here, go now!”

Enzo swatted his half-brother’s arm and, shaking his head, gestured to the door.

“I don’t care! It’s because of *him* that our parents are dying!”

Enzo tapped his bald scalp—shaven since he became a chieftain two years prior—placed both palms on his chest, and gestured around him. He then waved to Abram and pointed to the ground.

“Fine. If that’s how you want to run the house in our mother’s stead, fine.” He snapped his fingers at Abram and said, “Get back to the servants’ quarters before I pitch you out the window, you good-for-nothing son of a bruise-brained *weevil!*”

Abram skittered out of sight faster than his feet could take him, stumbling once or twice along the way.

“Well, thank you, medicine chief,” Gerosim said, every word spitting acid, “I’m going to make

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sure my wife and son haven't been poisoned as well."

With his absence, Enzo was left alone to communicate with the medicine chief. Reaching into the small sack he always carried on his belt, he took out a scrap of paper and a stick of coal, scratched out a message: *Is there any treatment?*

The medicine chief shook her head soberly. "As advanced as their illness is, there's little to do. Some are recovering well, but I must honestly state that the chances are slight."

Enzo wrote another question: *What can I do?*

"The poison must be flushed from their bodies. Unfortunately, as the illness has the tendency to slow or stop the natural waste relief process, it can't be done by giving them anything to drink. In fact, I would recommend restricting their fluid intake to only a small cup per day, perhaps of wine or whatever you have that is safe to drink."

Enzo shrugged, showing him again the previous question.

"The only hope is to bleed them. However, I'm hesitant to do so, because from what I've found, the poison takes hold in a vital area of the abdomen. It must be done with precision, and it must be done with great care of timing. It has been effective in some cases. In others..." She winced. "They were saved from suffering through a lengthy illness."

Enzo's stomach wrenched into a knot as he realized he had to decide what would be done. His parents were rendered comatose by their illness, and could not decide their own fate. Gerosim, besides being under the influence of his ill temper at the moment, was lower in the household rank. With a sigh, Enzo scrawled his decision onto the paper and showed it to the medicine chief: *Do what you can, you have my consent.*

The medicine chief gave him a list of items she would need, including two things required of the whole household: silence and patience. Under usual circumstances, she would not allow anyone in the room with her while she worked, but seeing that Lord Enzo kept a cool demeanor—and was mute—she allowed him to sit in the room as she attempted to cure his dying parents. His father was the first to receive her physic. Needing some way to keep himself grounded as the medicine chief prepared to cut into the patient, Enzo held onto his father's clammy hand. He had to watch so that he could act fast if anything went awry. The medicine chief made her cut, and blood trickled across the Baron's skin. Enzo looked to his father's face. He had felt no tension in his father's hand to suggest he felt the knife, and no muscle twinged in his father's face. If he was still alive, he wasn't suffering—not the illness, not the knife, not anything.

Enzo waved to get the medicine chief's attention, pointed to his mother in the other bed, then shook his head.

"I won't," the medicine chief replied. "It is apparent now that the disease is too far along for any help. I won't mar the Baroness." As she cleaned and staunched the cut she had made, she said, "I am sorry I couldn't be of more help."

Enzo put his palms together and bowed his head to thank her for taking the trouble of coming during such weather.

Normally, Enzo would have shown his guest to the door. But he couldn't bring himself to leave the room unattended, and so he instructed a servant to take the medicine chief to the storage room and allow her to take as much barter as she wanted for her fee, then to take her to Gerosim so that he could row her home. In the meantime, he orchestrated what he knew his parents would want. He first moved the end table dividing their beds to the other end of the room, then he pushed his mother's bed beside

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his father's. Now near enough, he could put his mother's hand into his father's hand—though it felt as detached as fitting a belt into its buckle. Pulling up a chair, he sat beside his mother's bed, waiting for any sign of change or resolution.

Foremost in his mind was how the well could have been poisoned. When he first heard of it, he wondered why none of the Sentries had reported to him. But any thoughts of the Sentries' lack of responsibility quickly became aimed towards himself. The day that everyone traditionally began filling their reservoir jugs, he had Sentries stationed at every well, barring their use until he and the Alchemist had personally examined and tested each one, then deemed it safe. Along the way, he had noted every shrine, seeing that they were well maintained, and sensed only contentedness from every Spirit he came by. Everything that could have been done was done, he had thought, but there must have been more that he should have done.

The grave silence of the bedchamber was interrupted by a soft sigh of wind. Enzo could hear the entity clearly as she swept into the room, despite the closed windows—it was the Spirit Tu'enta that had doted on him since they met. His brow furrowed in severe annoyance, wishing that on this day of all days she could leave him alone. However, not only did she say few words, which was in itself astounding, but each word in a tone more sincere than he had thought her capable—she was giving her condolences. Then she simply hovered near him, radiating sobriety and comfort.

His parents' hands moved—or so he thought. He thought he saw the hands tighten their grip on each other, but a moment later, they looked as still as before. He had been staring for so long, he wondered if he had seen anything or only imagined it. Leaning forward, he listened for their breath but could hear none. Rising, he checked the pulses of both his parents, noting that now they both felt cold—they had both passed on at last.

Knowing that no proper preparations could be made until the seasonal flood had ebbed, he covered his parents in sheets and left the room as their tomb for the time being.

When Gerosim returned, he and his family paid their respects, as did the servants of the house—except for Abram, who was missing. With Tu'enta's help, Enzo was able to find the missing servant just outside the servant's cottage, sinking into the water. Enzo dove out the window and into the water, clutching the man under his arms and pulling him to the surface. Tu'enta directed the current of the water toward the partially submerged bridge between the manor and the cottage, the shallow water only just covering Enzo's toes. Lying Abram on the wet planking, Enzo began pressing on his chest and administering breath until the servant coughed, sputtering water from his mouth. When he opened his eyes and saw Enzo, he began wailing and sobbing into his hands. Enzo sat him up and embraced him with a reaffirming pat on the back.

With Abram returned safe to his family, Enzo dismissed any who posed questions to him—including his half-brother—and closed himself in his chamber with ink and paper. There were many things on his mind that needed to be settled, and he knew it would work best if he wrote it out rather than working through gestures. Setting it down in ink also helped him to feel more resolute about his decisions. Once he finished, he called the entire household together and gave the paper to Gerosim to read aloud:

I am aware that in this difficult time of sudden tragedy, the household is uncertain of where to turn. By my legitimacy of birth, I am to inherit the title of Baron, along with the family manor. The title, I cannot legally abandon. However, the manor is mine to give, and so I shall, to my brother.

Gerosim looked up from the paper. "What are you, loony?"

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Enzo twirled his finger, indicating that he should read on. And so his brother did:

It is unreasonable for me to continue living in this house on my own when my brother and his growing family are confined to the smaller estate in Eveshade, Alkat. As soon as the flood waters recede to safe levels, Gerosim and his family will send for their things and move into the family manor, and I will move into the Eveshade estate. The servants will remain at the manor, where they will be of more use, and I will take only Abram and his family with me to Eveshade. This is only under the condition that the remaining servants will be cared for and dealt with by Faina.

Gerosim looked to his wife, Faina. She had already been crying, but she summoned a few more tears with joy at Enzo's generosity to her family and herself. Faina nodded to accept responsibility for the servants, but Gerosim scoffed. "Look, Enzo, this is an incredible offer, but we can't live in this neighborhood. We aren't counted as Noble."

Once again, Enzo signaled for him to keep reading:

Even as Baron el'Adal Berat, I cannot legally bestow Noble titles, except to any family of my own. And since I have no family of my own, I am legally allowed to bestow a title onto anyone eligible to be my heir. And so I proudly name my nephew Senek as Earl el'Adal Berat.

Faina looked down to the newborn sleeping in her arms who was unaware of his new title. She then looked again to Enzo, concerned. "Enzo, would you not rather reserve that title for when you have your own child?"

Enzo dismissed her concern with a shrug and wave of his hand.

It was no great surprise to Gerosim, who over the years had known his half-brother to rant about any woman he became interested in, and how these women would all give him the same argument: "If you really loved me, you would speak to me." On the one hand, Gerosim thought Enzo to be completely out of his mind—he could have been married with his own children years ago, and with a very fine woman. But on the other hand, Gerosim could relate—he had always hated when women accused him of not loving them merely because he was unwilling to change who he was. Faina was the only one to ever love every part of him. With a slight shake of his head, he finished reading:

From this time and until these changes can be made, I will assume the role as head of the household. But I will not hesitate to consider the advice of those who will become masters of the house. Now, I would like to recommend that, in consideration of the passing of the most excellent Baroness Alyona and Lord Lazar, that we all observe silence for the remainder of the day.

"I agree with the observance," Gerosim said, "but I do first have a question about your moving to Alkat..."

Enzo shook his head and waved his hand away—his question would have to wait until the next day. Just the same, Faina thanked him with a kiss on his cheek before she retired to her room. Gerosim could only smirk with doubt and give his half-brother a genial slap on his back. But whatever the communication, everyone parted in silence.

When Enzo reached the solitude of his bedchamber, he sat on the edge of his bed, hunched over with his forehead to his fist hands, and released his tears of grief.



Weeks later, when the autumn floods diminished to half their levels, Enzo made all the

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arrangements necessary for himself and his half-brother's family. He would borrow a large boat for his trip to the Eveshade estate in Alkat, bringing along his things, Abram and his family, along with a small array of the manor servants, who would pack up Gerosim's family things from the estate and transport them back to the manor in the same boat. The only thing to do before departure was the proper burial of Baroness Alyona and Lord Lazar. Already in their air-tight coffins acquired by an emergency order during the autumn, they were given a neighborhood eulogy, then anchored heavily with leather straps and rocks to sink them to the bottom of the Stretch, where the graveyard of the manor's descendants had been for generations.

It was Enzo's day to leave Adal Berat. In his bedchamber, he took an empty sack and began loading it with the myriad of shiny and metallic objects that had accumulated on his desk.

Gerosim entered and handed him a piece of paper. "This is the list of things we'll need sent over from the estate."

Enzo nodded and pocketed the paper.

"You know, there's something I had been wondering about you going to Alkat... what about your position as Chieftain el'Adal Berat?"

Enzo shrugged, sweeping his hand over his head.

"You do care! So do the citizens, they love you. I know you..." Gerosim's voice grew dark. "Don't tell me you're doing this because Tu'enta wants a change of scenery?"

Enzo shook his head, but his half-brother wasn't convinced.

Gerosim scoffed. "Don't you think you've been living under her shadow long enough? It's been two years! It's not like it's bad enough she kept you from being Shaman, but now she won't let you be Chieftain? I mean, you do realize you have the power to control her?"

Enzo pointed to himself, shook his head, then waved both his hands away as though shooing a fly.

"You can't banish her? Are you sure? Have you ever tried?"

Enzo merely looked at him with brow furrowed.

"Yeah, I know, the Shaman forbids it. But..." Gerosim stared pensively for a moment. Then he seemed to relax. "It's your life." He shrugged and leaned against the wall. "She's not helping you pack for the trip, eh? All take and no give. What kind of Spirit is she, anyway, a Weed Spirit? Maybe Parasite?"

Enzo thrust his elbow into his half-brother's side.

"Take it easy, she's not around to hear me. Where is she, anyway?"

Enzo merely twirled his finger—she was somewhere around the house.

"Anyway, Faina made some special tea for us all to share before you leave, so don't expect to just slip out."

Enzo shook his head.

"Well, see you downstairs." Despite his farewell, Gerosim remained for a moment to watch as his half-brother continued packing away the trinkets. Then he quietly mused, "You know, I can't help but respect you for being mute, odd as it is. But I hope to Gallidon that you're not doing it for the Spirits."

Enzo stopped his packing to look at him.

"You wouldn't tell me either way, though, would you?" He huffed a sigh as he jerked from the wall and walked to the door. "It'd be a feral shame."

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When Enzo finished packing and joined his family for tea, he noticed that Gerosim was much less involved in conversation than he usually was, only making short answers when he was addressed. Afterwards, as Enzo boarded the boat to depart, waving farewell to his family who had joined him at the port, he had a strangely empty feeling—something was wrong. He stood for a moment on the gangplank, looking curiously back at Gerosim.

Abram, who had readied the boat for departure, asked, “Is there something wrong, sir? We are ready to go.”

Closing his eyes and raising his head, Enzo began to realize what was amiss. He held out his hands palms-forward with his fingers spread apart.

“A Spirit?” Abram asked. “You mean Tu’enta?”

Enzo listened with the best of his abilities, but could hear nothing. Tu’enta wasn’t following him—in fact, she didn’t seem to be anywhere near.

“Is she angry, sir?”

Enzo shook his head and waved his “Spirit” hands dismissively.

“She is gone?”

Enzo nodded.

“I am sure she knows where to find you, sir. Come, we must leave before the mist thickens.”

Enzo boarded the boat. Since the autumn floodwaters had receded, the winter fogs seemed to start early, making long-distance travel difficult. There were only certain times of day when a lantern could provide sufficient guidance through the deep grey veils.

“Some advice, little brother...!” Gerosim called out as the boat began to pull away from the port.

Enzo stood by the side of the boat to listen.

“I realize the bald head is part of the grand tradition of chieftains, but at least grow a beard or something, will you? You look like a turtle!”

His shoulders shook with laughter—it was inevitable for the last thing for Enzo to hear from his half-brother to be completely inappropriate to the situation. After all, it was likely they would rarely—if ever—speak face-to-face again, living days apart from one another. In retaliation, Enzo pantomimed punching himself in the throat, an insulting and vulgar gesture common throughout Stretch of Shadow. And as the boat pulled deeper into the mist, dissolving the port from sight, Enzo could hear Gerosim’s hearty laughter barking across the water.



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