

Heirs of the Vigil-Star

Queen Freyna roused her children three
From out their beds and bade them come,
So each one followed cheerfully,
Her daughters Haestran and Naree
And lastly Falladryr, her son.

Down from the shining Vigil-Star
The four made for the world beneath.
The children's hands held Ultik arms,
Their mother's eyes sought Ultik harms
And found one in the cold mists wreathed.

A cave within a mountainside
Whose corpse-stench spread out for miles,
And held within were those who'd died,
Rotting trophies strung up high
Whilst skulls sat on the floor and smiled.

'This will do.' said grim-faced Freyna.
'You three shall delve within this cave,
Find whatever wrought such slaughter,
Prove you are my son and daughters
Then burn this ridiculous grave.'

The Queen left her children alone
In the vilest den in the land,
And cautious over bloody stone,
They crept about the mulch and bone,
Their swords held tight in their smooth hands.

A too-soft path led deeper in,
Their feet sank slightly with each step.
They walked on a carpet of skin
Where ordered skulls still glared and grinned
Whilst eyes and hewn limbs wept.

The light of day faded all too fast,
Replaced by a dancing flicker
Of torchlight from a chamber vast
Where awaited a vulgar ghastr
Who parted with a reedy snicker.

The youths stepped around the corner,
Their heads held high as honour bade.
A robed skeleton there did titter,
By fell-magic held together
And in each hand were surgeon's blades

'Have you a voice?' asked Falladryr.

'Have you a mind, or something close?
Or have you but a puppeteer
Who twists your strings and cowers near?
For you're a disappointing foe.'

'Oh I can guess at this fool-plot.'
Mocked Haestran with a weary sigh.
'Some churl bound in bones this sot
Who bitterly now shares its lot,
Or feebly, at least, it tries.'

Young Naree, youngest of them all
Said nothing but advanced to fight,
For she alone heard desperate calls
From souls to this dread-thing enthralled
And she fain set this nightmare right.

'Ultiana!' Yelled her siblings,
And the beast replied with a howl,
A high and wrathful whistling,
A thousand nightmares promising
From that dread shriek beneath the cowl.

It lunged with spidery swiftness,
Its long arms swinging both blades wide.
By less than half an inch it missed
The throat of Naree who did twist,
With a practised speed, to the side.

Haestran struck at one of the arms,
Her blade glanced off as if off stone.
Her parents' training forced a calm
And she stepped back, well clear of harm,
Ere came another swing of bone.

Falladryr leapt on five bodies
Heaped next to the deathless monster,
Then drove the sword's pommel madly
Down upon the skull of the fiend,
The blow fared the same as his sister's.

Another slash of its curved knife
Caught the young Prince about the face.
The cut was deep, the blood was rife,
Yet posed no threat to his young life
And did not stop his pace.

A strike from Haestran tore the cloak
And from the tear, a glint of blue.
The calls of pain to Naree spoke,
Their remaining wits now awoke
As, for a trice, their scant hope grew.

They had no voices, but Naree
Read the signs in their change of mood.
'Destroy that stupid robe.' said she.
'Then about his bones we'll see,
I am certain of it, a clue.'

The fiend did seem to understand
The words of this eight year old girl.
A blade turned quickly in its hand
Then with a force no flesh could withstand
At young Naree, the blade it hurled.

It would have struck her through the heart
If not for Haestran's quick parry.
With a metal note and with sparks,
'Neath a rack the blade did depart,
Then Falladryr moved on the fiend.

Two quick sword slashes tore apart
The robe about the shrieking bones,
And there where should have sat the heart,
A floating jewel took up the part,
A soulless shade of blue it glowed.

In a panic the fiend lashed out
But by then Haestran joined the fray.
One knife 'gainst two swords proved a bout
It found fared ill, it gave no clouts
Not cuts, for all it need fear no blades.

Finding a chance, Prince Falladryr
Stepped round, knelt down and grasped the jewel.
The fiend shrieked manically and it reared
And writhed, its fury turned to fear,
Its bearing looked not half so cruel.

With a final pull, out it came,
As it passed the spine; its glow soon dimmed.
The shrieks were silenced and the frame
Of the fiend fell to join the slain.
Insincere now seemed its skull's grin.

The three paused to feel relief
And let their breath and wits return.
Till Naree, breathing through her teeth,
Still shaking 'neath the ghostly grief,
Spoke the words of a spell she'd learned.

Placing her hands on her brother's
She spoke a short incantation.
Great strength was lent to Falladryr

Till the foul heart he could shatter
Which he did. It screamed once more then.

'There was a Demon in that stone.'
Naree said, for the tale she'd learned.
'It commanded these ancient bones
And hid for many years, alone,
From the hell where it should have burned.

'Without that jewel, if I am right,
Its jailers will have snatched it back
And this time they will hold it tight
Within its proper, burning plight,
And all its victims chains are cracked.'

Haestran ruffled her sister's hair.
'Except for the chains of their skin.'
She said, 'Let us burn this sick lair
Make pure the mountain and the air
And make complete this worthy win.'

Falladryr flicked blood from his face
And lifted Naree o'er his shoulders.
'Mother will expect from this place
A token of what we have faced.
You grab that, I'll see to the fire.'

In short order the cave did burn
No one else died in its darkness.
Queen Freyna was most pleased to learn
The glory her children had earned
On one more of childhood's tests.

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