

*The Lost Tale of*

**SIR  
LARPS  
ALOT**

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ONEMILLIONWORDS

# Chapter 1

## THEATER OF THE MIND

*an approach to role-playing games that requires few physical props, favoring instead the use of verbal descriptions of setting, characters, and action.*

(In other words, using your imagination.)

Wounded and weary, Good Company ascended from the dungeon, climbing toward daylight.

Sir Larpsalot led the way, the creaking of his plate armor killing the unnatural silence. There was no need for stealth. The five heroes had already defeated the guardians of the supposedly abandoned mine—not to mention triggered a fair number of traps on their way in. Now all that remained were a few cobweb-covered stairs between the exhausted adventurers and safety.

Elvish Presley followed closely behind Good Company's leader, stepping up beside his dear friend as soon as they traded the stale air of the mines for a fresh breeze. While Sir Larpsalot squinted and scanned the vast horizon for new threats, Elvish Presley spent a moment basking in the much-missed sunlight.

After that massive maze, puzzles aplenty, and an epic battle with diabolical doubles of the heroes' loved ones, could their trials here truly be over?

Elvish Presley's reverie was cut short as Sir

Larpsalot's announced, "'Tis clear. Neither man nor beast roams the barren lands surrounding the Mines of Snoria."

"Thank the *ckuphing* gods for that," rumbled the deep voice of Brutus the Bullheaded. The minotaur pushed past them and buried his double-bladed battle axe deep into the dry earth. Elvish Presley noted that Brutus's shaggy, black hide was matted with blood. "That map we found down there better be worth it. Nearly lost my one good eye while killing Black Angus...*again*."

As Brutus scratched his newest scar, which stretched down from the base of one horn to just above his left eye, Elvish Presley said, "Why, Brutus, I thought you never tired of battle. Was that not the reason you named your axe 'Plan A'?"

Brutus grunted. "Pretty sure *you* named it."

Elvish Presley clapped a hand on the minotaur's broad back. "Ah, well, I suppose we wouldn't want your next instance of blinding rage to be literally blind."

Brutus grunted again. "Yeah, and I'd look pretty stupid with *two* eyepatches."

"Agreed." Elvish Presley reached into his long, blue-suede cloak and produced the party's Bottomless Bag. "Only one stamina elixir remains, and you are welcome to it."

Brutus shook his head. "No, the magus needs it more."

Elvish Presley turned to find Sir Larpsalot helping Master Prospero up the final steps of the mine. The man leaned heavily on his darkwood staff, looking frailer than usual, as though his time underground had aged him by years, not days. But when the minstrel pulled the yellow-green potion from his pack and offered it to him, the magus waved it away.

"I have one spell left," Master Prospero told him. "If no new trouble finds us, I may cast an incantation to restore us all a bit."

Now it was Elvish Presley who shook his head. He was

not at all surprised that the clever human held a single spell in reserve, but the elf knew they would more likely see a fireball fly from the Staff of Er'Mah'Gerd than any kind of healing magic.

He suppressed a shiver. After everything they had endured in the mines, Elvish Presley prayed to the ascended souls of Gracelund that Good Company would need neither.

"I'll take a potion!" declared the final member of the party.

Last one out of the dungeon, Tom Foolery grabbed the stamina elixir, popped open the cork, and took a great swig of the enchanted liquid. Elvish Presley had tried to hold onto the bottle, but even with his nimble fingers, which could strum the strings of a lute more deftly than anyone alive, the Minstrel King could not hope to keep Tom Foolery from his prize.

Elvish Presley smiled helplessly at the dwarf. "And where was your goddess-given dexterity when you failed to disarm that last trap?"

Tom Foolery took another gulp of the elixir and said, "Quinlehar works in mysterious ways."

"Indeed she does, my friends. Indeed she does."

The strange new voice echoed just inside the mineshaft. Each member of Good Company spun around in surprise. Sir Larpsalot unsheathed Excalibur, though not before swift Tom Foolery drew his enchanted daggers, Slice and Dice.

Brutus hefted his battle axe over one brawny shoulder and said, "Here we go again."

But Elvish Presley's keen eyes penetrated the darkness of the opening. "Stay your blades! He is no enemy of ours."

A familiar figure exited the Mines of Snoria. Although the middle-aged man wore no armor and carried neither sword nor shield, he stood as straight and proud as Sir

Larpsalot—as any Knight of the Coffee Table.

“Well met, Sour Ron,” Sir Larpsalot called. “’Tis a surprise to find you here. You need not have lingered after guiding us to this place.”

“Yet how could I leave?” Sour Ron asked. “The Holey Pail is my sole hope of regaining the honor I lost when Llamalot fell. And now that you have reclaimed the map to that treasure, we are one step closer to rousing your father and the rest of the slumbering knights.”

Master Prospero took a step closer to Sour Ron and gave the man a shrewd look. “Your words carry a measure of truth, but your betrayal of Llamalot was surely forgiven when you helped us forge the key to open the Mines of Snoria. So I cannot help but wonder what prompted you to enter the accursed caverns...alone.”

Sour Ron frowned. “Always so suspicious, Master Prospero.”

Sir Larpsalot stepped between the magus and the dishonored knight. “Sour Ron, pray forgive my companion’s disrespect.”

The man held up a hand, though he kept the other one behind his back. “Alas, I am afraid the magus’s suspicions are justified this time.”

Sour Ron’s hidden hand thrust forward. Sir Larpsalot tried to bring up his shield but was too slow. If not for Master Prospero, whose desperate shove sent both of them to the ground, the magical boomerang would have struck Sir Larpsalot square in the chest.

Too stunned to do anything but gape, Elvish Presley finally managed to exclaim, “Sour Ron has been the Lord of the Rangs all along!”

The Lord of the Rangs laughed. “Indeed I am! With the Holey Pail, I will open a gateway between Mezzo-Earth and my hellish kingdom of Down Under. Your world will fall to my forces within a fortnight!”

“How many weeks is that again?” Elvish Presley heard

Tom Foolery ask. "I can never remember."

Two more smoky black boomerangs appeared in the villain's hands.

Sir Larpsalot leaped to his feet just as the Lord of the Rangs released one.

"No!" the holy knight cried, swinging Excaliburnt with all his might. The fiery blade shattered the missile in midair. Before the Lord of the Rangs could throw the other boomerang, Sir Larpsalot brought the tip of Excaliburnt's scalding blade to his enemy's exposed neck. "Drop it and surrender, you knave!"

The Lord of the Rangs obeyed, though the smirk never left his face.

"Just cut his head off and be done with it," Brutus growled.

"Do it, Larpsalot!" Tom Foolery added. "Kill him, and we can all go home!"

But Sir Larpsalot stayed his hand. "Rest assured we will have justice, my friends, but we are not murderers. I vow that this fiend will answer for—"

Sir Larpsalot's words were cut short as a dark whir struck him in the back of the head. The black boomerang—the first one the Lord of the Rangs threw at the knight—had returned. Now it fell to the ground.

So did Sir Larpsalot.

For a split second, everything was quiet. Then chaos erupted.

"I need time to cast my final spell!" Master Prospero wrapped the Cloak of Shadowbright around himself. The magus's form became indistinct, if not truly invisible, as he retreated a handful of paces from the action. "Keep him busy!"

Rather than attack, Elvish Presley dropped to his knees beside Sir Larpsalot. "There must be something in the Bottomless Bag to keep him alive. There *must*!"

A few yards away, Brutus turned to Tom Foolery and

said, “Give me some cover!”

The minotaur was already charging ahead, battle axe raised above his horned head, when Tom Foolery replied, “But I’m at full health...and the last time I threw Slice I almost didn’t get it back!”

Elvish Presley continued to pull item after item from the Bottomless Bag. “Sneaky Snake Skin? No. Ghoul’s Gold? No. Tincture of Tinkle? Argh! Stay with me, Sir Larpsalot!”

Meanwhile, the minotaur and dwarf rushed forward together. Master Prospero continued to recite the words to Torchnado, his strongest fire spell, helpless to defend Brutus as another black boomerang shot forth from the Lord of the Rangs’ hands.

Despite his massive size, Brutus the Bullheaded managed to dive to the side just in time to avoid the attack—but collided with Tom Foolery in the process. Both heroes hit the ground hard and didn’t immediately get up.

“*Tissh!*” Brutus shouted, cussing in his native tongue.

Tom Foolery swore too, but the words sounded strange and wrong.

“Hey, no *real* swearing, Trent!”

Still rummaging through his mom’s old purse in search of something useful, Asher spared a glance over at where his two friends had fallen. Makayla was down on one knee, gripping her hockey stick—Plan A—in one hand and brushing dirt from her scuffed knee with the other.

Trent lay on his back beside her. Cradling his leg, he swore again.

“Time out, OK? I think Mak broke my ankle!”

## Chapter 2

### LARP

*an abbreviation for Live Action Role-playing, for which players dress up and physically portray their characters, as opposed to table-top gaming, where players move miniatures across a map and roll dice.*

(In other words, make-believe.)

Lorenzo opened his eyes when he heard Asher walk away.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” he muttered.

Lorenzo turned his head to see what was going on. Even though the football pads—his pretend chest plate and pauldrons—were digging painfully into his back, he didn’t want to get up. Not when the Lord of the Rangs was still unconquered.

Of course, their imaginary foe, along with the desolate battlefield, had vanished the moment Trent broke character.

But Lorenzo was reluctant to get up from the forest floor. Trent had a history of overreacting to bumps and bruises. Like the time he got snagged on an old barbed-wire fence near the property line. Asher was willing to weave the incident into the story, declaring the cleric—half cleric, half rogue, and all klutz—had run afoul of a



tripwire.

Sadly, Good Company had ended their larp early anyway because Jon, Trent's big brother, just had to mention tetanus—along with the disease's painful symptoms.

From where Lorenzo had fallen, he couldn't get a clear look at Trent now. His scorched wooden sword, Excalibur, partially blocked his view, and Asher was already standing over Trent, who wasn't much taller than his dwarfish counterpart.

"Can we *please* just finish the battle?" Lorenzo asked, though there was no way any of his friends could hear him.

"...your own *ckuphing* fault," Mak was saying as she got to her feet. She straightened her Viking helmet and glared down at Trent. "I told you to stay out of my way. You're lucky you didn't stab yourself or me with those bejeweled steak knives of yours. Why even carry enchanted daggers if you aren't going to use them?"

"I *was* going to use them," Trent argued. "Up close! The Lord of the Rangs might've been able to grab them out of thin air if I threw them...like that Talismanian Devil from a while back. I didn't want to lose Slice or Dice."

Lorenzo watched Mak throw her hands up. "Who cares if you lose 'em? It's the final battle!"

Then she looked over at Lorenzo, hands on her hips.

"Of course, we wouldn't even be in this mess if our party leader wasn't such a wimp."

With a loud sigh—partly in reaction to Mak's insult and partly because they obviously weren't going to resume the battle anytime soon—Lorenzo stood up. Ignoring Mak's glare, which looked all the meaner due to Brutus's eyepatch, he walked over to where Trent sat scowling at his foot.

"I'm a paragon, a *holy knight*," Lorenzo stated as he took off his brother's old football helmet. "We're

supposed to be the good guys, remember? I wasn't going to decapitate the guy in cold blood!"

"Well, maybe you should've," Trent said. The chubby kid rubbed his ankle and winced.

Asher frowned, but before his best friend or Lorenzo himself could defend Sir Larpsalot's noble alignment and virtuous actions, Jon joined the group.

"I would have killed him," the older boy said. "It was the reasonable thing to do."

Lorenzo rolled his eyes. "Here we go..."

"But that is an attribute Good Company has never been able to boast... *reason*," Jon continued. "How many times have we bumbled into danger because our paragon felt it was the 'right' thing to do?"

"Come on, guys." Asher scratched at his curly mop of red hair and frowned.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," Lorenzo said, "and if Master Prospero was the party leader, no one would ever get hurt, and every battle would be won with a single spell."

Jon shrugged his bony shoulders, then tightened the dark gray robe around him. "You said it, not me."

"Guys," Asher repeated.

"But you *have* said it...a million times, in fact," Lorenzo shot back. "When are you gonna get it through your thick skull that nobody wants you in charge, Jon?"

Mak scraped her hockey stick across the dirt and snorted. "I don't know. After today's *ckuph*-up, I might be willing to discuss a change in leadership."

Lorenzo shook his head. "Really, Mak? Even after Prospero nearly got Brutus killed while we were all searching for that stupid staff of his?"

"Guys."

Jon clutched the treasured walking stick, painted black and covered with strange symbols he had carved into it, against his scrawny chest. "The Staff of Er'Mah'Gerd has saved Good Company more times than—"

“That *was* a long side quest,” Mak admitted.

“—and at least I can use its power more than once a day, unlike a certain legendary sword I could name.”

“Excaliburnt is essential to the plot!” Lorenzo shouted with a glance back at his wooden sword, which lay beside his dented trashcan lid.

“*Guys!*”

Everyone turned to Asher, whose freckled face had turned a bright red.

“Enough already!” In a quieter voice, he added. “Just...enough.”

Jon shrugged as he plucked a loose thread from his homemade robe. Mak moved more dirt around with her hockey stick. Lorenzo was about to apologize, but Trent spoke first.

“Like it even matters anymore. This was our last larp, and it’s over now.”

Trent made a great show of getting to his feet, leaning against a birch tree and sucking in his breath every time he put even a little weight on his right foot. For a moment, the only sound was Trent limping through the underbrush.

“Asher doesn’t leave for a few more days,” Lorenzo said at last. “Put some ice on your ankle, and we’ll re-schedule the showdown with the Lord of the Rangs for tomorrow.”

Trent pulled up his hood and hawked a loogie into the trees. “Why bother? Even if Asher wasn’t moving away, it’s time we stopped with all this...this *kid* stuff. I mean, we’re starting high school in a couple weeks!”

Lorenzo could have pointed out that Jon was already a high schooler and had no problem larping with them, but he knew it wouldn’t do any good. In moments like these, there was no traces of fun-loving Tom Foolery—just mopey Trent Hawthorne.

“Are you gonna give me a hand or what?” Trent asked his brother.

Jon shrugged. “OK.”

The teenager walked over to Trent, who grabbed the Staff of Er’Mah’Gerd and put his arm around Jon. Angrily hobbling away beside his gangly brother, Trent looked even shorter and heavier than normal.

Yeah, Lorenzo thought, as if giving up larping is suddenly going to make someone like you cool, Trent. He immediately felt guilty for the unspoken roast and turned back to Asher and Mak.

“The three of us could finish without them. Sir Larpsalot is out of commission anyway. I could play Prospero. Or Tom Foolery.”

Lorenzo waited for an answer while Asher stared at the center of the clearing, which had served as the setting for the final confrontation with the Lord of the Rangs, the Mines of Snoria, and a dozen other battlefields over the past few years.

“Nah,” Asher said at last, pulling off his pointed ears. “I’m just gonna clean up...clean it all up.”

Mak set Plan A against a tree and shoved her eyepatch into the pocket of her torn-up jeans. “I can stay and help if you want.”

Lorenzo was about to say much the same thing. He felt annoyed that Mak beat him to it. *He* was Asher’s best friend, after all.

“I can stay too,” Lorenzo said. “Taking down Camp isn’t going to be easy.”

Or at all fun, he thought.

Asher gave them both a sad smile. “That’s OK. I kind of want to do this on my own.”

Lorenzo wanted to argue. Asher shouldn’t have to collect the props from their countless campaigns all by himself. *None* of them should have to clean up—not before their story had an ending!

“Are you sure?” Mak asked, once again speaking the words before Lorenzo could.

Asher tried to make his smile happier but failed miserably. “Yeah. Thanks anyway, guys. I got this.”

Lorenzo had heard that defeated tone in his friend’s voice before—most recently when Asher told him about his impending move to the West Coast. As much as he wanted to comfort him, Lorenzo knew Asher needed time alone to feel his feelings.

“Fine. Let’s go, Lopez.”

Mak walked away, pulling Lorenzo by the arm. He didn’t resist—a lifelong jock, Makayla Schmidt was probably stronger than he was—but as the two of them crossed a field already littered with a few dead leaves to their bikes, he took one look back.

Asher scooped up the map to the Holey Pail, which must have fallen out of the Bottomless Bag during the battle. Lorenzo nearly ditched the annoying girl and sprinted back to his best friend since second grade.

This wasn’t goodbye. Although he knew it would suck, he’d be there when Asher and his parents got into the moving van and drove away from Fond du Lac. But this *was* farewell to Elvish Presley, the longtime companion and mentor of Sir Larpsalot. The Minstrel King had vowed to help Sir Larpsalot restore the cursed Kingdom of Llamalot.

So much for a happy ending. Or *any* ending.

Across the field, Asher unfurled the map. Lorenzo wondered where the relic was hidden and what other adventures Asher Brzezinski would have written for Good Company if real life hadn’t intruded.

“You coming, Lopez?”

Mak had pedaled a few yards down the dirt path that would take them through the woods to the stretch of highway that connected their houses.

Instead of answering, he biked past her and mumbled, “RIP, Good Company.”