



THE GOLDEN KNIGHTS



In the Age of Legend, the Spring Queens ruled the *Erid Wold*, the mighty wood of An-Athair, from their Green Temple. They were protected and championed there by the warrior order of the Golden Knights. According to most of the written records of the Golden Knights, the vast majority of them rose to knighthood from common backgrounds. Only a few are recorded as coming from noble or lordly houses, and most of the records of the period portray the traditional royal and noble households of An-Athair and Dania as being in relatively weak positions, both politically and economically, until after the Winter Century. The Golden Knights were farmers and herders, blacksmiths and carpenters, brewers and craftsmen who heard the call to arms to defend the Priestesses of the Queen of Earth, and who were inducted into the order at the Green Temple with a blood oath and a kiss and a blessing from one of the Spring Queens. According to the old stories, the bond created between the Knights and the trees of the Green Temple gave them great strength and endurance, allowing them to draw upon the strength of the Wood and the Earth in times of need and danger.

The recorded names of the Golden Knights numbered in the hundreds, but a few stand out in the tales. Ser Penwyn of Heer was famed for his physical exploits, including leaping the great gorge by Gordine in the Vale of Flowers and outpacing the Wild Hunt on a chase through the Éduinans to distract them from the Spring Queen Beverra, who had been caught outside

the protection of campfire or wall. Ser Gales was famed for his singing sword, *Gallaswale*, and his gallantry. Ser Sherwaine slew the Dragon of the Dentyn Moors, a huge beast that had broken castles apart to eat the inhabitants, with a lance carved from one of the trees of the Green Temple. Sers Benreuth and Ferne fought one of the most famous duels of the Age over the still-beating heart of the murdered Maiden of Abeuth, whom they both loved above all others, and eventually found love with each other in their common love for her. Their hunt of her murderer, the Knight of the Shroud, is equally famous, ending with his dismemberment at the hands of the spirits of the Ghost Falls.

Ser Gyrfyrd is often cited as the first great Golden Knight recognized outside of An-Athair itself, for single-handedly defending the castle of Hyrval, King of Erid More, against Danian bandit knights, thus winning his friendship and cementing the alliance between the western Danians and the Athairi during the Age of Legend. Ser Mendred saved the Daradjan Queen of Heth Moll, Ara Basi, from the brigands of the *Cyr Faira Mal*, one of the most dangerous Daradj brigand bands of that and any other Age, and brought her to the Green Temple so she might become a Spring Queen. The *Explata D'Aurus Thanas a Efraine* details almost exclusively the adventures of Ser Peredock and Ser Gareint, sent by the Spring Queen Ymaire to act in the service of Efraine, the Lady of Av Lúin who, though not recorded as a Spring Queen, stands as one of the great women in Danian history, an adventuress who roamed far into the Red Wastes accompanied by her Golden Knight protectors.



TEXTS ON AP-ATHAIR

The legends and history of the Golden Realm of An-Athair can be found primarily in the *Athairesian*, the great collection of Athairi and Danian tales from the Age of Legend, which includes perhaps the era's most beloved tale, *Afare and Argus*, about the tragic True Love between the Danian Princess Afare and Argus, the Knight of the Golden Eyes; the *Explata D'Aurus Thanas a Efraine*, an epic western ballad in old Éduinan common to both the Danians and Maelite traditions; the *Praxa Athreas*, an epic Athairi poem about the knights in service to the Spring Queen Ymaire during her war against the Wyvern King and her competitions with the Spring Queen Morfane; and the *Maera-Thanas Edderas*, an Aurian ode about the Sea Bulls who took service as Golden Knights.

The Golden Knights were primarily Athairi in background, but also came from amongst the Danians, the Daradjans, and others as well. The descendants of Heth, King of the Sea, named themselves the Aurians, but were called the Sea Bulls by most of those that felt the wrath of their sea raiders. Their great migratory raiding fleets were repelled by the Palatians, but then next made shore on the eastern coast of the Danias and struck inward towards the wide woods of the *Erid Wold*. Some of the Aurian raiders were impressed with the Golden Knights who defended the great Wood, and sought alliances and friendships with them, and so met the Spring Queens and were enchanted by them. Unlike in the Athairi and Danian traditions, many of the Aurians who became Golden Knights mentioned in the *Athairesian*, the *Maera-Thanas Edderas*, or the *Auric Edderas* (the main Auric odes of the Age of Legend) were of noble or warrior stock to begin with. The great sea captain Odyr became the first Aurian Lord of

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Ogruth before he became a Golden Knight; Helggar was the first Aurian Lord of Andria; even Boros the Old, who had been born in the Far North before the Aurians began their great migrations, was of noble birth, though his clan had long forgotten his titles or position by the time they arrived in the Middle Kingdoms.

The Aurians who joined the Golden Realm soon found themselves fighting their brothers when their eastern lords, under King Orfewain of Therapoli, King Theyr of Urphalia, and King Ferga of Édain, began a war of conquest against An-Athair in earnest. The magicians of the Eastern Kings of the Aurians had learned from the Horned Man that if they cut down the trees of the *Erid Wold* and covered the stump with a stone, that they would lessen the strength of the Golden Knights. This secret allowed them in but a few scant years to transform over half the forest into the Plain of Stones. With their powers lessened, the Golden Knights were unable to stop the eventual pillage of the Green Temple and the rape and murder of the Spring Queens by the victorious warlords of the Eastern Kings.

THE LIEFRINGS: THE MEN OF MISAL RUTH

After the sack of the Green Temple, the surviving Aurian Golden Knights largely retreated to their remaining holds to defend themselves as best they could, and their fate might have been worse had not Heth the Sea King, angered at what his children had done to the Spring Queens, destroyed the fleets of the Eastern Kings and left them landlocked. Suddenly bereft of their core identity as sea raiders, the eastern Aurians were thrown into disarray and confusion, allowing the surviving Golden Knights amongst them some time to consolidate their holdings and positions. Then the swift conquest of the Aurian lands by Dauban Hess gave them all a common oppressor, allowing the Aurian Golden Knights and their enemy brethren cause for alliance and cooperation. Even though peace was eventually made between them, the schism took centuries to mend, if it ever really fully healed. Even to this day, some of the Aurian lords descended of the original Golden Knights hold themselves separate and aloof from their fellow Aurians, and keep some element of the rituals and

Athairi Spring Queens, an Athairi Golden Knight, and an Aurian Golden Knight (near right); illustration from Artesia: Adventures In The Known World

practices of the Golden Realm in their lives, either in secret or hidden in plain sight as “folk” rituals and local festivals.

Amongst those that hold to the Athairi Ways are the Aurians of An-Ogruth, An-Andria, Whitebridge, Bainwell, Dyn Cail, Collwyn, and Misal Ruth. Many of them intermarried with their Danian and Athairi neighbors on the Plain of Stones and the Plain of Horns over the centuries, though some pure lineages can still be found. Chief amongst those of pure Aurian lineage are the Liefings, who claim descent from their patriarch Odwulf, the third son of the Golden Knight Odyr, and through their descent from him lordship over the castle and lands of Misal Ruth. The matrilineal line is generally not held important amongst the Aurians, but the Liefings make note of a mermaid ancestress (who according to clan legend saved Odwulf’s grandson Gidwyr from drowning and fell in love with him) and have a mermaid as their banner symbol.

The lords and knights of the Liefing clan have long figured in the histories and folk tales of the Aurian kingdom of Atallica as warriors, tourney champions, and in particular gallant and chivalrous lovers of the fairer sex. They have long been known for hosting revels open to all, and they are generally considered in high regard by the common folk of the region. The popular ballads written about them over the years include a number of bawdy odes, including *A Man From Misal Ruth*; *The Gallant at the Bridge*; *The Dancing Swordsman*; and *The Knight with the Golden Grin*.

While the Liefing clan might enjoy popular status amongst commoners and minstrels, they are somewhat less fortunate in the opinions held of them at the High Court, where they (and other descendants of Aurian Golden Knights) are viewed with considerable suspicion if not outright hostility. The current Baron of Misal Ruth is Wallis the Young; his father, Wallis the Elder, was well known for brandishing his fondness for the old Athairi Ways in the form of a garland of flowers that he wore wrapped around his left arm, and the freedoms he gave both his wife and his daughters were considered scandalous by many, and put the family in some social jeopardy within the highest circles of the Middle Kingdoms. Indeed, his two eldest daughters, Silga and Gailbas, are spinsters despite being able to boast businesses, lands, and properties that they have earned of their own accord (and in the face of long-standing Aurian traditions against the ownership of property by unmarried women), and considerable dowries promised by their brother. Neither is believed to be particularly upset about their condition.

While the Elder Wallis had allowed his daughters the freedom to become educated and to choose mates of their liking, politics and economics dictated a different fate for his heir, and he reluctantly made an arranged marriage for his eldest son with Fralline Urgoar, daughter of a wealthy Aurian merchant from the Danian city of Westmark, to secure the clan’s finances



THE KNIGHT WITH THE GOLDEN GRIN (EXCERPT)

*Behold a knight come bold and lively
A song upon his lips, a sword upon his hip
Behold a knight in armor shining lightly
A crown upon his brow, gold spun in his hair
His face wearing a Golden Grin*

*Behold a maiden dancing fast and fair
Washing in the river, sunning on the shore
Behold a maiden with unbridled hair
With lingering hands and parted lip
As the knight steps forward, meeting her gaze
Behold the knight on bended knee
And flashing her a Golden Grin
And giving her a Golden Grin*

after a bad drought year prompted several creditors to seek repayment of debts. Frallas herself turned out to be an independent woman educated by Danian and Athairi tutors, which seemed to please Wallis the Young; but no heir has been forthcoming from their marriage and it is widely whispered that she cuckolded Wallis the Young with his blessing. This has perhaps perversely made him even more popular amongst female commoners in the region, with whom he has been rumored to dally on a regular basis, as is not uncommon for knights and lords away on the road for months at a time. But the unusual openness of their marriage has made both Wallis and Fralline the subject of much gossip and innuendo – though their reputation is not nearly as bad as Countess Uthella of Uthmark’s, the reigning champion of scandal.

The Elder Wallis did not spend much time at the High Court, nor did his sons and daughters; but he died there, excusing himself from a debate on tax reform before turning purple, foaming at the mouth, and going into spasms in a side chamber. The Liefing clan immediately suspected poisoning, but the University Magisters and priests of the Sun Court that inspected his body could find no evidence of foul play. The death of his father soured Wallis the Young even further on the High Court, and he has barely returned since becoming Baron, turning his back on them in favor of time spent on the tournament circuit and on his own lands. His gifts with sword and lance, and that of his retinue, are widely respected, and the Grand Duke Owen Lis Red (who reportedly once said “I don’t care about a man’s politics, only that he can kill someone when I call on him to do it”) has often found a place for the younger Wallis in his entourages on campaign. This patronage may be all that has kept Wallis the Young from sharing his father’s fate.