

LOST REALMS of MURKASADA

The Quests of Helfarch

by Andrew Vaisey



DEDICATION

This humble novella is dedicated to...

Mike Singleton, Dave Lebling, Richard Garriott, Andrew E. Bailey, Dene Carter, John P. Flynn, John & Ste Pickford, Derek Brewster, Andrew Braybrook, Steve Turner, Steve Meretzky, Russell Grahame, Ian Bell, David Braben, Robert Holdstock, Peter F. Hamilton, Martin Walker, Jason Kelk, John Twiddy, John & Steve Rowlands, Manfred Trenz, Steve Wahid, Paul Hughes, John Meegan, David Collier, Robin Levy, Paul Docherty, Hugh Riley, Jeff Minter and the memory of James Herbert.

And of course, Chantelle xxx

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PROLOGUE

For almost fifty years, Queen Elin Eyrien reigned over Allorona, a peaceful and welcoming land populated by a vast array of peoples from across the realm. Aided by her Council of Elders, Elin ensured all the villages and towns she ruled were thriving and prosperous.

There were rumors of ordinary looking objects created by the great wizard Mawdach that helped Elin guide the destiny of Allorona, powerful objects that were used for the greater good of all and never with malevolence or malice.

Then the day came when a prodigious threat appeared in the form of a great army lead by Eaedred, accompanied by the evil sorcerer Skeskris. A great conflict ensued, more cataclysmic than anyone could have imagined. Large regions of the realm were reduced to useless wasteland, covered with permanent ice or ripped apart to form enormous canyons and mountains.

Elin and Mawdach were defeated and Eaedred became King, the unpredictable, hostile and callous monarch of the now devastated Allorona.

Prior to the conquest, Elin tasked her Council of Elders with hiding the most powerful of Mawdach's objects across the realm, lest they fall into possession of Eaedred and Skeskris for them to learn the secrets of these mystical objects.

That was just over two hundred years ago. Still Eaedred rules Allorona with a reign of terror, having extended his life by locating one of the magic objects, the 'Cloak of Life'. But Eaedred longs for total supremacy by pursuing more of the objects.

The cloak was found by a bounty hunter, a fearless and courageous knight who now questions his service to the King...

1. THE GOLDEN CHALICE

Helfarch was stood on the hoarding of the castle's main tower gazing at the nearby Cottlepar Forest, contemplating the quest recently bestowed on him by King Eaedred. He was mentally plotting the most efficient route to the nearby village, using his knowledge of the dense trees and bushes that did their utmost to obscure the paths that meandered across the realm of Allorona. His brow was furrowed, but his eyes were wider than they had ever been.

“Something troubles you, Master?” It was Aled, the squire of Helfarch. Aled had been in the service of Helfarch for five years now and was very much attuned to his master's moods.

“Indeed,” replied Helfarch jadedly, “this latest commandment from the King bothers me indeed. Or rather, what it could mean once I have successfully found the chalice he so desperately desires.”

“It is only a golden chalice is it not?” queried Aled.

Helfarch sighed more loudly than he had intended. “Aled, if what the Assembly of Seniors has stated is true then this chalice is no ordinary golden drinking vessel. It purportedly once belonged to a great wizard called Mawdach and it is so told that anyone who drinks from it is temporarily granted the power of invincibility. The King already rules resolutely and such power would undoubtedly help him further his grip over Allorona and beyond.”

Aled stood staring at his master. Helfarch could feel the intense stare as though he was being struck by fiery arrows. “Surely,” said Aled eventually, “the King has every right to wield such power? He is the King after all? Surely it is better our King possesses such a powerful object?”

Helfarch managed to suppress another loud sigh. “I don't believe any one person should hold that much power, particularly if it is not to be used for the good of many!”

Aled continued to stare, his eyes showing signs of suspicion. Helfarch realised he needed to choose his words more wisely. Aled was loyal to him, but would ultimately prove to be more loyal to the King if pushed too far. At this point in time, Helfarch had no desire to test the faithfulness of his squire, at least not until the golden chalice had been found.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Huge thanks must be doled out to Jason 'T.M.R' Kelk and Jon 'Moloch' Mines, without whom I would have never learned 6502, would never have written the 'Lost Realms of Murkasada' Commodore 64 game and in turn would never have written this (very) humble novella.

An extremely large portion of additional thanks must also go to Ray 'Warlock' Lejuez for his continued positive support and for allowing me (did you really have a choice?) to steal a small idea that eventually led to the 'Lost Realms of Murkasada' game on the Commodore64.

A thank you must go to Vinny Mainolfi of FREEZE64.com 'zine and Andrew 'Merman' Fisher for taking the time to playtest the game in its early stages and for offering comments and suggestions.

Thanks for testing w0rm!