

The Kershane Story

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Elves have existed in number, historically, in the eastern parts of Perrenland long before the arrival of the new races. Unfortunately, their grace and culture has suffered terribly in wars with these new more primitive yet virile cultures. The last surviving cultures of Elves in the Flanaess have been driven back into their strongholds within of the great forests and high mountains. Elven culture is in decline.

Historically, in the area of Perrenland, a thriving Elven culture once existed in the Clatsberg Mountains. This culture was dominated by the city of Kershane, a majestic stronghold of gray elves. Vassal towns of high and sylvan elves, gnomes, and Flan (human) communities for a time formed the historic Principality of Kershane. This Principality controlled the lucrative Kershane pass trade route, a vital link in trade and communication from the western Baklunish kingdoms to the eastern Flan and Oerdian kingdoms. From this did the Principality derive its wealth and power, its troops protecting merchants and free trade from the Yatil mountains to the borders of the Vesve.

The Principality had close ties with the Elven kingdom of Celene, when it was a vibrant kingdom allied with other good nations in the fight against evil. With the expansion and imperialism of the Great Aerdi Kingdom, however, and the successive invasions by the Aerdi into area's previously controlled by the nomadic Flan, Kershane's prosperity, and indeed the prosperity of all the elven nations began to decline. A new darkness soon gripped the world, and from it was born distrust and a hatred of difference. All the races suffered the blight of xenophobia, and division was plunged ever more deeply into the hearts of the old alliances.

Kershane was forced, for the first time in its history, to fight for its very existence, pressure from successive waves of new invaders taking a heavy toll on its resources. The last of these were the Guurhok hobgoblins, themselves driven into the Clatsberg mountains from the Sepia and Vesve by other creatures driven from their homes by the Aerdi. For several decades the Guurhok were defeated, but rose again like the phoenix, faster to die than the Kershane elves but quicker to breed. Often they were led by treacherous and powerful men, but at other times a powerful member of their own race rose to unify their splintered clans. The result was that the Kershane elves were slowly driven back into the heartland of their territory and became, as did so many races of this time, suspicious of outsiders, and cut off from the world.

Then, in about 142 CY by human reckoning, approximately 450 years ago, the Guurhok attacked with a strength and power never before seen. They were more skilled, and seemed driven with a fanaticism for which the Kershane was not prepared. Just as this war was reaching its most desperate state, allies unlooked for came to the Principality's assistance. Tilfias Rood, a strong and powerful Aerdi noble from the Quaglands (Western Perrenland), led a legion of his soldiers and drove the Guurhok back from the gates of the city. In joy at the unforeseen victory the city celebrated, and treated their saviors with great honor, and for this, Tilfias and his clansfolk betrayed them. As Tilfias and his soldiers were shown the hidden treasures in the deepest halls of the city, and the splendor of Kershane was revealed for the first time to the Roodbergs, their hearts filled with lust.

At their weakest in joy the Kershane elves saw not the change in the hearts of their new friends, and did not sense that knives of lust that had been drawn against them. The night was plunged

from joy into a scarlet nightmare, and a desperate fight to survive began. With its people being put to the sword, and shown no mercy, the people of the city fought to save their children, who had been secured for the night in the citadel. As men and women fell in great number throwing themselves weaponless into a fight that they could not win, the guardians of the city's two greatest treasures, the Kershinarim (an artefact of untold power) and the precious children, came to a desperate decision. Dian Weirtherlihte the last of the high guardians (wizards) of the city, and his guard, decided to take the Kershinarim into the heart of the battle and evoke a power within it that had not been used before. The guardians of the citadel and the children were to bar the gates once they had left and let no one enter, friend or foe. Thus, it was that Dian put on the girdle known as the Kershinarim, and fought his way into the middle of the battle. With his guard falling around him he poured his power into the Kershinarim until, with a clap like the loudest thunder, the battle was ended. Friend and foe alike were slain as their souls were rent from their bodies and sent screaming in horror from the place of their death. The souls could not go far, however, since desiring ever to flee from the horror of their demise they found themselves bound by that horror to the place of it they could go but a few miles. Here they stayed, spiralling around the city, and here they formed a shroud of tormented souls in constant flight from the place of their demise yet unable to flee. This shroud of antipathy formed an impregnable barrier that no one could enter or leave and so it was that the children and the few guardians that survived became trapped, and Kershane faded into the myth that it had once been.

Yet Kershane did not die; the children and their handful of guardians had survived. When at first they emerged from the citadel they were shocked into near stupor by the carnage, and it was some days before they began the grizzly task of burying the dead. It was then that they discovered that Dian Weirtherlihte and his guard were not amongst the slain. This became the greatest mystery of the tale. Had they survived or had the Kershinarim destroyed them utterly. Tilfias Rood and his men were burned in a great pyre that took several days to die down, blackening the earth. Over the centuries since, a huge black and withered oak has sprung from this place, and few of the Kershane are willing to go near it.

Since that time, the myth of Kershane has condensed into three widely know fireside themes. One, that a great kingdom of elves once existed in the pass but was destroyed by the hobgoblin Guurhok over four centuries ago. Two, the dark stories of the haunted woodland of Kershane to the north of St Cuthbert's monastery, which all travellers with wisdom avoid, and that those who enter never return. Three, and the queerest of all, are the haunting tales of how every year on the night of the summer solstice on the first day of Richfest that the haunted wood sings. Travellers moving up the pass on this night tell of a haunting yet beautiful song sung by a multitude of voices in words that are not recognisable. Many bards have tried to decipher its meaning but have failed. This has given rise to the belief that it is the dead souls of the wood lamenting their end.

In truth, these myths have, like all myths, a strong foundation in truth. The Principality of Kershane did exist, but was not destroyed. The wood surrounding the city is haunted by the souls of those killed in the final battle by the activation of the Kershinarim. The song on the summer solstice is both a lament and a focusing of power. Every year, for many centuries, as the children were tutored and grew to adulthood eventually having their own children, the whole trapped community of Kershane would assemble as close to the barrier of souls (called the Shroud of Antipathy) as they could approach to sing. The song served two purposes, one was to try to placate the tormented souls, and the second was to give one member, chosen for their strength of will, to attempt to pass into the shroud, a better chance of success. For over four centuries many tried and failed, often returning insane, and still more often returning not at all, their fate unknown.

Five years ago, in 588 CY, one of them succeeded, and returned to Kershane to show others the way. Now that a way has been found through the shroud, it has begun to weaken, as the souls of the dead have also found a way to obtain peace. This led to both joy and fear in the Kershane elves. What they knew of the world was nearly five hundred years old, and, although they were now over four thousand in number, they were, by Elven standards, young and inexperienced.

The thought of losing their protection in order to gain their freedom led to a rapid decision being made. It was decided that initial contact with the outside world should be to see if the Kingdom of Celene still existed, and to seek aid and knowledge from their brethren there. The envoys that were dispatched, after a hard journey, reached Celene and opened secret negotiations with its ruler, Queen Yolande, whom they recognized as their supreme sovereign, the Lady Rhalta of all Elvenkind.

So it was that a very surprised Prince Naugrim Genhene of Celene, a knight of Luna, and outspoken critic of the Queen, was summoned to her closest council. Prince Naugrim, an experienced yet rebellious noble, was, by direct descent, the old prince of Kershane's nephew. He was invited onto the absent throne of Kershane as Prince since his blood was the closest to the old Prince. This he accepted, arriving with his family and entourage of knights in 592 CY. Prince Naugrim set about the task of reintroducing Kershane to the outside world before the shroud disappeared altogether, which it eventually did in 594 CY.