

The Fall of Carn Dûm

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This is the tale of the last king of Carn Dûm (Barazbizar), a Dwarf-hold in the vale of Angmar, and can be dated to the mid-Third Age. It was first written down by Arthadonian scholars studying the origins and weaknesses of the Witch-king's dominion. It is of Dwarvish origin, of the saga form, and was reported by a Dwarvish merchant and trader from the Broadbeams of the Tumnogoth laur. The saga is but a segment of the long 'Fall of Gundabad' of Durin's tribe, but the detail and length of this variation is unique.

It was in mid-winter that Thúlin son of Kulor returned half-dead and blinded in the northern ice, where the frozen plain rose up toward Carn Dûm, the red vale, which is ever spoken of now with terror.

Carn Dûm, Barazbizar, where the earth bleeds iron, the realm of Brór son of Bran, eldest son of the Broadbeams, where Gram first ruled and shaped the encircling hills into a mine and home, his will made real by the power of a Ring.

Now with fell force and secret cunning the Orcs had come, their master unknown and dread, and into their claws first Baruk-zigil fell, like the coming of a plague amongst Men, and now with winter's first snow the hallowed chambers of Durin at Gundabad were the feasting halls of the abhorrent goblin-host.¹

Only Barazbizar stood alone, and into its vale and caves came the remnants of a vanquished people, of many tribes and kin, into the guardianship of Brór. Even the throne hall held the cots of many refugees, grim and weary and thirsting for revenge. The gates of Barazbizar were said to be unbreakable, and their arches were carved with runes of warding, made fast by a Ring of Power.

Though the folk of Baruk-zigil were kin, and from the eldest of Angmar's delvings, wealthy in copper, once, they now were beggars about the sealed gate, living like Men, in crude houses.

Thúlin son of Kulin was a guard and a kinsman of the royal line, one young and hale, but in his heart oppressed by a yearning for glory. He was one of the first volunteers who trekked, Lossoth-style, on wide frame-shoes into the land of Angmar, into the white sky-land.

There was beyond the vale, in the plain, the camps of Lossoth hunters, the Lothrandir-drivers, who the king hoped to hire to deliver messages to his trader kin in Arthedain and Durin's halls. Here they were accustomed to winter, where the forage was

better in the deeps of winter than their summer homes in the lands of ice.

With Thúlin was his brother Kulin, and the warriors Fari and Droni, who were of Gundabad. They made slow progress. When they were beyond sight of Carn Dûm, they made camp beside a frozen stream, erecting a hide-tent which hunters had sold the Dwarves many winters ago. It was no great proof against the wind, and sleep was hard in coming.

Kulor was on watch in the predawn, when he heard the sounds of howling blending in screaming wind and awoke his fellows. »We will have to work before breakfast«, he said.

Each warrior was burdened with the lightest armor that could be found that was still sturdy and carried axes alone, for the weight of too much iron could crush the snow and make the journey impossible. But they were fine axes, forged in Tharbad and Nogrod long ago. From the armory of the king they had come, marked with the dead hand of Telphin and Telchar.

It was with a still speed that the two wolves came, still more like charcoal in the snow were coming, and they stood tall and dire; for in their eyes and maws the Dwarves could see the evidence of necromancy, and evil banes drove the beasts to hunt. They paced the camp at a distance, and glowered.

First one, and then swiftly the rest lurched and lunged into the Dwarves, who stood back to back and planted their boots wide. Axes fell. Thúlin beheaded the wolf that rammed its slaving jaw into his leg before its mouth could clench, but Fari had toppled over and with a wet crunching noise the wolf tore out his arm. Droni buried his axe into its skull.

Fari grimly bade his companion to slay him, and his body was burned, so it would not feed the foraging wolves or Orcs.

The survivors did not dare to turn back or camp that night, but moved angrily

across the ice until they came upon the camp of the Lossoth. The smell of smoke emboldened Kulin, but Droni held his arm.

»That is not peat you smell«.

Indeed the camp was empty of life. Before the main tent were the piled heads of the tribespeople. Their roasted bodies had been eaten not long ago. The Orcs had broken the legs of a few Lothrandirs who had died slowly under the ripping bites of their wolves. The Lossothren chieftain's corpse had been torn apart in the tribal shrine. It was the death-eagle.²

Thúlin told the others of each of the hunters, their names if he knew them, and they built a cairn, commending it to the protection of Mahal. His count revealed the Orcs had taken prisoners.

Now they were united in purpose and dark hope. No one said anything about returning to the halls, but there could be honest vengeance, at least.

The Orcs had not travelled far. In a colossal swarm they discoloured the horizon. The sky was full of scavenger birds and the baying of packs of wolves drowned out even the wind. A black banner flew in the midst of their encampment, strung at the pole with the shields and heads of the kings of Gundabad and Gram.

The plain was flat and only the hillocks of snow and dying trees made for any terrain. The frozen mud-tracks revealed that the army was proceeding north toward Carn Dûm. Small numbers of wolf-riders scouted afield and at the head of the army was a man.

Droni cursed the decision not to carry crossbows. He was certain he could down the commander if he was given one. Thúlin observed the horizon northward carefully.

»I will remain and distract the scouts. Many Dwarves will die if a messenger does not get to Barazbizar before them.«

Kulin observed that his older brother was needlessly protective. He was, all told, an equal warrior.

»You are younger and swifter,« said Thúlin.

Thúlin crept forward until he was hidden by a snowdrift and waited for the sound of paws or feet. The first foe was wary, but not too wary. Thúlin was upon him in a rush of blunt strokes. But the cry of that foe brought others, two, three, a dozen, running forward, their cruel eyes multiplying in the dark. Wind howled to be cut so swiftly with long blades.

The first blow upon Thúlin was dull and heavy, the wounds were like a continual pressure, and the warrior could hear his heart in his ears...

Finally he could not stand and slumped into the snow. Gnarled hands wrestled him to the ground, and he was tied to stakes. Thúlin could hear the brutes conversing in their tongue, and even a hoarse laugh.

One of the foes tore a dagger from his belt and balanced it in his hand before Thúlin's face.

»Stunted one, let this be your last day. Crows will have you, crows will shred you, and they will exult in Dwarvish blood.« Ravens cluttered the grey sky.

And he drove the dagger into the Dwarf's face, cutting out Thúlin's eyes. »These are for me.« Laughter.

The Dwarf's sensation and thoughts were only of fiery numbness and helplessness, even the pain itself becoming so deep and full that it filled his heart like blood. But in the distance he could hear shouting, the army was moving on, and the sense of being surrounded faded with his will.

It was a long time, in the cold.

Scuttling on his head was the raven, which lunged and pecked before squawking suddenly and falling silent. Thúlin could hear a little and knew that someone was standing close to him.

In Lossoth the man spoke: 'I will give you peace.'

Thúlin wondered at the sound. I know you, hunter.« For he was an old acquaintance, a mixed breed hunter, of Northron and Lossothren blood.

»You spoke!«

Each word was rough and painful.

»Your kin are dead or captured. I know I saw your wife who I had known from last spring' amongst the dead. But of your child, I know not. Now the dark army will come to Carn Dûm, and take from me my kin as well.«

The words Thúlin heard were bleak and stoic. »It is borne better to die alone than

together with your family. What will you have me do, Bearded Half-man?«

»Even a blinded warrior can taste blood,« replied the Dwarf.

The hunter replied cryptically, »I can taste it myself.«

He cut Thúlin from the bindings and hesitated. »Do you want to go north with me? I can outpace the clumsy Orcs on my sledge.«

»Take me to Carn Dûm,« answered Thúlin.

So Thúlin rode holding the back of his rescuer and they went back to the Red Valley. When he felt his grip cease and darkness inside to match the darkness that he now beheld forever, the hunter suddenly spoke.

»What becomes of Orkish prisoners?«

»To the stew, I think.« Thúlin suddenly and cruelly laughed. He could not find any compassion in his heart.

»Nothing could buy them back.« It was not a question.

»The cost would be more than anyone could bear.«

»I suppose the Dwarves would have long ago bought off the Orcs if they could be.« The hunter's voice was tinged with a jealous anger.

»No.«

»These Orcs are led by a dark Man.«

»What can a penniless hunter offer to a ruthless Man? I suppose you can offer your wife, or your furs, or your life. But he will take them without payment.«

»Can you repay me?«

»What do you mean?« But Thúlin knew well.

»You Bearded Half-men repay debts.«

»Yes.«

Into the valley they came. Droni alone had returned, but it was sufficient. The great gates were closed and even the folk of Baruk-zigil were within. And the gates were firm against a steady and a resounding assault, which even at a distance, Thúlin knew what it was. The army had come before them.

So in the dark the two went into the foothills, walking in a great circle, and climbed above Barazbizar, so they could see the hive of evil buzzing in the valley, a charnel sea, and the engines of hurling, of splintering and of smashing.

There was a secret way down, if you were bold enough down the vents, carved centuries ago from the peaks into the depths, that let steam and smoke ascend from the forges deep below. Heat and gas

would deny the route to even a troll, but the forges did not run forever; certain were permitted to cool, from time to time. And Thúlin could still smell the scent of a cold forge. Without eyes, he was not sightless. In the barren earth and ice he could feel the breath of Carn Dûm. The mountain whispered and it groaned.

Where was the door?

The Dwarf was silent and he walked with his hands ungloved, touching the cold and heat until he found a broken ledge, with a boulder cunningly weighted. Now he had to have the hunter's eyes. And so he guided the man's hands into the proper indentations.

So through a blistering tunnel, twisting amid the heartstone and trailing the volcanic wormtrails, carved with indentations for hands and feet, the hunter, his eyes closed against the sting, helplessly clutching Thúlin, they came into the heart of Barazbizar.

Fire and iron combined in brilliant sparks, and here was war made ready and the hammers, the hammers were drums, the brilliant shields emblazoned for war, lay in rows, under a vast ceiling which even the flames could not fully illuminate.

The man gasped and Thúlin even in his pain could not but be joyful. »This is my home, hunter. Even the sounds are beautiful: of hammers and of Dwarven speech, of the bats and of the drip of the waters of the earth.«

Into the care of the craftsmen of the body was Thúlin rushed, and the hunter was taken before the king.

King Brór sat at the head of a great hall, wrapped in furs and with a great hammer across his knees. Around his throne stood fourscore warriors, all ready for battle.

»Man« he said, »You have done one of us, my kinsman, a great service.«

The Lossoth looked on.

»And let it not be said that we have no wealth to spare for our friends and allies.«

The hunter looked about and beheld the richness of the king, and his generosity to his folk. Then he said, »King of the Bearded Half-men, I seek only the price of a slave. Into the hands of the Orc-host has fallen my only daughter, who I would redeem. I beg you, give me something that I may trade for her.«

The Dwarf king sat in cold silence. In the secret tongue he said to his steward, »I would never, even in due payment, deliver a Dwarf-wrought valuable into Orkish hands.« He studied the ring on his hand.

Now for many years the Dwarves of these delvings had in their arrogance traded plated goods, proclaiming them precious, to the Northern tribes, and none too cheaply, too.

From the stores of such goods the Dwarf-king offered a torque, chased and gilded, but in truth of tin.

Now when he saw this gift the hunter gasped, and wept, and the king turned away.

Then the hunter proceeded alone to the secret way and harnessed his sledge and set off into the winter gloom. From the hill above the vale the hunter could spy the besiegers, yet constructing works from timbers dragged from the far woods about Mount Gram.

Amongst these builders were dark men of the East, bought with stolen Dwarvish gold, and the hunter knew if he was to present his case he must find someone from amongst their number who could find the dark general.

Thus he hid his Lossothrin braids and his bone symbols and came down into their number, making himself invisible in the crowd of foreign Men. Soon a troop of horsemen came forth, inspecting the great ram, and at their head was a grim figure, clothed in iron and a black shroud.

The heart of the hunter was frozen and still. This was no mortal Man. The face of the general was wrapped like a winter hunter, but no eyes moved in the open slit. Then a swarthy lieutenant beside him cried,

»A spy!«

The warriors about him pushed him to the snow and tore away the hunter's concealing hood.

»I am no spy... no!«

»Kill him!«

The hunter pulled the torque from his wallet. »I come to buy one of your captives!«

The dark general rode over so that he towered over the fallen Lossoth, and now the hunter saw that the breath of the figure did not steam into the cold. The lieutenant beside him dismounted and took the torque. His eyes gleamed with greed.

The creature on the black horse gestured and was handed the prize. With a easy movement he broke it in half, exposing the fraud for the gold was as paint on a base interior.

Now the hunter was silent and still. Brór had betrayed him.

The voice of the evil king rumbled.
»This is not enough.«

From the distance the hunter could see his daughter being carried into his view, bound. With her were a few other captives. But he could not see her well.

»New made is this, and Dwarven?« asked the lieutenant.

»Yes.« He could not resist, as if the voices in his head had rushed out and overwhelmed him.

»I have come from Carn Dûm.«

The dark figure looked at him with his formless face.

»I know of a way in.«

When the hunter grasped his daughter, he could not help but tremble. He put her on the back of his mount and wrapped her in blankets, and then softly began to sing to her, as the Lothrandiras snorted and began to ascend the path away and far from the war and treachery.

Now at noon he saw the warrior-Orcs of the army climb into the crevasse that secreted the vent. Then, without much thought he released his reins. »Daughter! You have kin far off beyond these mountains, to whom I entrust you!« Then he took his bone carvings and tied them to the antler of the Lothrandir, beseeching the spirits to guide them, and the predator gods to take pity.

With a start the Lothrandiras began to run, and the sledge behind it slide fast and true. But the hunter did not look. He took from his belt his horn and his sword and raised the horn and sounded.

From the mountain fell a sheet a snow and a thunderous tumult of ice and rock. Now he slipped down his eyes blinded by the sun now high above him.

A single arrow silenced him too late. Barazbizar was awake; and the hunter's body fell into the path below.

Into the steaming tunnels came fell trolls, broad and hardy, choking on the smoke and fire, Dying, their bodies tumbling from the walls within, but as the perished they were trampled by surging Men and Orcs.

Like water they passed through the halls. The king had come and was soon moving into the midst of the slaughter.

Brór clove the skull of the lead Orc, and in his fury took down many more. The warriors were soon daunted for above them, on the ascending stair, were many climbing Orcs and Men.

»Stoke the flame,« cried out a quick-thinking Dwarf.

Over the corpses of the smiths the warriors came forth and churned the bellows'

and fire erupted, driving ash and soot into the room, burning, tearing at the eyes.

Now sightless Thúlin led the Dwarves, their faces bound with cloth into the midst of the terror. Up and into the tunnels, out into the midst of the ambush...

The heat had melted the snow above the vent, and cold, rapidly steaming water poured past the Dwarves' knees. They came out into day.

Brór looked around and saw then the corpse of the hunter. Thúlin stood behind him, without any recognition in his dead eyes, but the thanes of Carn Dûm murmured. Around the neck of the hunter was the broken torque.

Brór commanded that his best warriors come forward, and none hesitated. Then he directed that all those left who could climb should do so, and make good their escape.

Many Orcs perished, but finally the Formless Man came, and he smote down the Dwarf-lord and he cut the ring from his finger, and Barazbizar's gates shuddered and all was lost.

Into the waste the Dwarfs made their escape, where they were found by scouting formations of the army of Arthedain, guided by the fears and the surmises of the Wise, and those who remained returned to their ancient homes, or came, with Thúlin the Blind, to Khazad-dûm.

The Lumimiehet were heard to speak in later generations of an old blind Parrakas Puolihminen who delivered a superb torque to one of the women of their tribe, who had no fathers or kin, since from out of the wilderness she came, who it is said, became a mighty shaman and *tietäjä*.³

And Brór's kin did not claim the kingship of the Broadbeams, but were sufficed to be Lords of the Nan-i-Naugrim, and remember forever the evil that had come.

Notes

¹ Read A:TL. 25-6 for references to Baruk-zigil.

² Lumimies is the term used by the Snowmen themselves for this tribe (Cf. NW). The 'blood-eagle' is a act of vengeful sacrilege against a slain or subdued person, in which the lungs are ripped from through the chest and laid across the back like bloody wings. If it does not end a feud it begins one. [In later Ages it was used by the pagan Northmen; one

famous example in 865 CE involves the translator's ancestors as assailants.]

³ Parrakas Puolihminen (Los. "Bearded Half-man"); *tietäjä* (Los. lit. "knower"). We must assume that the blind Dwarf gave the torque to the hunter's daughter, but how he came to find her or know of her fate is something of a mystery. Speculation that the Lossothren mythic cycle grew to incorporate these events (now lost) and that the saga was thus written

through the researches of Thúlin or a follower of his are not enough, since the events outside the Dwarf-mine could not be known.

In any case, Thúlin was known as cursed and strange figure in some other Dwarvish tales, though not an unsympathetic one. The historical person was later influential in various events, and actively endorsed friendship with the other Free Peoples, but the Broadbeam kings of the Nan-i-Naugrim held him to be unwanted in their lands.