

## Synopsis of Runecursed



### Erephonia

In Erephonia **Lady Irana Stemraon**, the future queen of the kingdom dreams about an antlered monster that emerges from an emerald well in an apple grove where she is imprisoned. Outside the garden walls, a nameless threat creeps, making her struggle in her chains. The creature breaks her shackles and has her under the trees, morphing into a tattooed mage once the act is over. He blasts open the garden gates and urges Irana to jump with him into the nothingness gaping below.

Irana has been married to Helbar Stemraon, the crown prince of Erephonia since she was five and ten. Her husband is six years younger than her and eager as he is in the bedchamber, he has not been able to sire a child on her. The western **Kingdoms** are in grave need of an heir with one of them having wreaked a war against the others, and King Hamar of Erephonia comes up with a scheme that might solve the problem was Irana not so profoundly appalled by it.

Despite Irana's life being as protected and comfortable as the life of a noblewoman can be, she is not happy. Her husband dotes on her, and although she likes him a lot, she doesn't love him in the romantic sense. She dreams about independence and a young knight of her Chamber Guard, **Sir Righar** who looks kinglier than any of the rulers of the western world in his gilded armor.

When King Hamar reveals his plan of pimping her to his unappealing cousin, Lord Rostan, in order to produce an heir, Irana decides it has come the time to take her future into her own hands. She begins to plan of leaving the court for good and as she encounters the tattooed mage from her dream at the

annual Spring Market, she starts to believe, she could actually become the puppet master of her own life.

She finds the man on a slaver's platform and takes him home to the castle. When he wakes up, it turns out that he has forgotten even his name due to a blow in the head and is anything but happy about having been saved from a life of enslavement. The reason for his umbrage is Sir Righar who hasn't made it clear to him that Irana has no intention of keeping him a slave. He explains that her keeping the man as a guest would spark too much curiosity in the courtiers. Just as would the priceless, ancient dagger she gifts him if he showed it to anyone.

The nameless man names himself **Buck** and when recovering from his ordeals consents to helping Irana, even if not without reservations. The outlaws attacked him while he was on his way to Girania and robbed him of all his belongings along with a throwing ax he was rather fond of. He finds a smith in **Emerald Point** and commissions him to forge a replica of the ax. On his way to take the drawing of the weapon to the smithery, he encounters a strange woman in grey who compels him to take a parcel to her son in the castle. By her description, Buck can only derive that the son in question is Sir Righar and he can't help wondering whether he's the rightful heir of which Aisha, a woman he acquired the external vigor to be channeled as magic in a dream, spoke. His Primary Source told him to trust no one but the rightful heir but whether that's Righar is questionable.

Buck takes the parcel to the knight anyway and they open it, discovering an ancient silver piece engraved with runes that not even Buck recognizes and a note that compels Righar to find the counterpart. The young man isn't overly excited about the task. He is a crown knight and devoted to his duties. Perhaps the Grey Lady's claim disturbs him more than he is willing to admit, however, for one night he dreams that he is king, holding a scepter with an amethyst embedded on the top. He throws a banquet to all people of the **Torn Continent**, a merry gathering that ends in chaos with living shadows intruding into the hall.

A little before the Spring Conflux, one of the four annual bonfire nights, Lord Rostan arrives at Emerald Point. He botches the king's plan the moment he descends from his horse by laying his hand on Irana without her leave. As she demands his hand to be lopped off as a punishment for his impudence, he makes the mistake of drawing a knife in the presence of both her and the prince. Yet, neither Helbar nor any of her knights on duty do nothing to seize him. It's left for Sir Righar to arrest the lord and capture him to wait for the execution that in Irana's opinion should've taken place on the spot.

Angry with her supine shields, Irana dismisses them all, except for Righar, and demands Buck to be knighted so that Righar doesn't need to guard her alone day and night. Grudgingly, Buck bends the knee, and confused Righar dubs him a member of the Emerald Knighthood.

The breach between Irana and her husband deepens when Helbar refuses to have Lord Rostan beheaded. Although Irana knows he is only doing what the Robes, the royal counselors, tell him to, she doesn't hesitate to make his reluctance to follow the law the final excuse for running from the court. His decision of calling off the hunting trip he had intended to arrange for the courtiers threatens to shatter her plans, but in the end, Buck comes up with an even better scheme.

The only shadow looming upon their departure is Irana remaining a virgin despite having shared the prince's bed for over a year. Buck warns her that the antlered monster doesn't exist only in the dream world but is very real indeed and will appear in the Conflux Night to claim her maidenhead unless she gets rid of it before they set out. Seducing Sir Righar turns out to be a mission impossible, however, and Buck offhandedly refuses to lay with her, fearing that her closeness might stir the beast drowsing within him.

As it begins to seem the princess shall be a maiden still when they leave the castle, Buck turns to the smith who forged his ax. **Thodir** is a former **Son of Stryader** and an old friend of Buck and consents to leave his life in Emerald Point to help Irana flee the court. They must act quickly for it seems someone has a hunch of their intentions and as Helbar orders Buck and Sir Righar to the war, they come up with a ruse that should leave everyone in the castle gaping in awe.

After Lord Rostan accidentally poisons himself with spiked wine, the Robes invite Irana to a meeting, trying to half cajole half extort her into taking her husband back into her bed. Instead of negotiating with them, she jumps out of the tower window with Sir Righar and disappears like a whistle in the wind, leaving Buck and Thodir to fight their way out of the council chamber through a swarm of knights.

## Girania

At **Conqueror's Cape**, the capital of Girania, the westmost of the Kingdoms, **Toren Eddesen**, a Hjelman mercenary and a member of the brotherhood of Sons of Stryader, takes up charge as the bodyguard of **Princess Miona**, the youngest of King Waldhark Rofinnar's three daughters. She's been hunted by

the assassins ever since her betrothal to an elven count, Gwdaen Faelviren, was announced and the king doesn't want to name a knight as her shield despite her demanding it.

Toren finds out soon enough that his ward is rather a piece of work. She's displeased with him and doesn't shun showing her feelings. To get him banished from the court, she frames him as an abuser but to his fortune, her elven chambermaid, **Awra**, witnesses the incident and stands up for him.

To Miona's umbrage, the sellsword isn't as easy to scare on his way as she had hoped. He remains at the court and proves his worth as a bodyguard by saving her from an assassin that strikes when she is fitting her wedding gown. The court's sartor, Erzibhas has a dozen boy slaves who have gained themselves the nickname the Silks due to the sartor's habit of always dressing them in silk, and one of them attacks Erzibhas and Miona in the fitting room, cutting the sartor's throat. He intends to do the same to Miona, but Toren saves her in the nick of time.

With one of them having wielded an assassin's blade, the Silks' futures don't look too luminous. Toren cannot bear the thought of innocent children getting imprisoned or worse and with the help of one of the courtiers, Lady Meribet Bugglestan, he buys the whole lot of them from the crown. He intends to send those of the boys that are willing to his homeland, **Aenerhjelm**, where they might join the brotherhood or find sanctuary in the **Green Halls**, a shrine maintained by the priestesses of the supreme goddess Maelethra.

Toren's greatest weakness is women and in no time, he finds himself in Meribet's bed regardless of his decision not to lay a hand on the ladies of the court. He also gets himself a squire, a boy named **Tim**, who wishes to forget about his horrendous past as one of the sartor's Silks by serving his savior.

The king and the queen try their hardest in cajoling Toren into accepting a place in Lady Miona's convoy when she sets out for her new life as the Countess Faelviren, but he is determined to continue on the mission that brought him to Girania: finding his missing brother who traveled to the west following a prediction according to which he was to save a deer princess from the oldest enemy.

Finding Adan's warhorse in a coper's paddock at the Spring Market cements Toren's decision to go look for his brother as soon as the princess sets out to the Counties. However, on the particular trip outside the palace walls, he once again parries an attempt to her life, and even though Miona isn't even present when the crossbow bolt meant for her hits him in the arm, King Waldhark, and Queen Faina grow ever more insistent in their demands that he should join the convoy.

Toren values brotherhood over gold and owes his life to Adan, besides, so again, he refuses. He has also started to suspect that Sage Otmar, the king's eldest and most trusted counselor, and Lady Miona's longstanding teacher knows much more about the attempted assassinations than anyone could guess. He warns Lady Meribet about him and makes Tim and Awra patch him up after the attack instead of letting the sage do it.

Awra has been ordered to Octower by the ruling count of Flwthean to tell Miona about the elven culture and customs, but when she dreams about a young sailor with a rune-engraved token implanted in his chest, she knows she'll never return home. As it happens, her mother has given her a similar token and passed on to her the gift of foresight going in their family, and her instinct tells her to find the amethyst-eyed man who bears the counterpart to her token. She also knows that Toren is in grave danger in **Octower** and urges him to leave at once, begging he'd take her with him when he does.

Not long after the Spring Market, the king has enough of Toren not consenting to his demands of joining Lady Miona's convoy and dismisses him in a fit of anger. Toren doesn't linger in departing the court and as the princess kicks Awra out, too, he decides on taking her with him. Tim leads her out of the palace along the secret passageways with which he has come familiar during his enslavement and leaves her outside the wall of the Old Town to wait for Toren and him.

Toren's relief is palpable as he rides out the palace gates, and Tim could hardly rejoice more in the freedom and adventures ahead. Awra, however, cannot bridle her curiosity when she sees a black galleass rocking on the waves of the western sea, and despite Tim's warnings not to leave her hideout behind the entrance to the passageway, she hurries to the harbor to see if it isn't the ship from her dream with the amethyst-eyed sailor on board.

At the harbor, she bumps into a man with a scarred face who belongs to the crew of the black galleass but claims he knows no one matching Awra's description of the Amethyst. Although Awra isn't convinced of him speaking the truth, she heeds his warning that the likes of her are sure to get into trouble wandering alone at the harbor and starts back to the wall of the Old Town.

## Aenerhjelm

A Hjelm soldier, **Arron Grethsen**, embarks on the flying galleass, **Breeze Bitch**, as he has done many a time before, but unlike in the previous visits, this time **Captain Katrina Reushammer's Star Compass**, a queer device of

magic, points them a direction. They're to sail west which both Katrina and the **First Mate Eweret Lingryn** find peculiar. The Compass knows where the seeker needs to go, however, so they head west.

Arron is convinced he isn't looking for anything and a conversation with Eweret reveals to him that he is only having an exceptionally bizarre dream. Breeze Bitch flies west to Conqueror's Cape and the captain takes Arron to the Spring Market where an ancient augur grabs his sleeve and advises him to stay at the gate. She also tells him to see behind the veils and gives him a gemstone, an aquamarine.

Arron wakes up from the dream wearing the clothes Katrina gave him and her silver, wheel-shaped pendant on his neck. As strange as it all is, he hasn't got time to contemplate it as he is to go enlist for the war in the Kingdoms with his roommate Raenn. They head to their haunt to celebrate the enlisting and end up sharing a table with two Sons of Stryader who are bound to Erephonia as well. The younger of the warriors, a dour, onyx-eyed fellow, instantly piques Arron's interest, and after lunch, he asks **Jan** to accompany him on the trip to his childhood home in the moors outside the city.

They ride through a blizzard to Arron's mother's cottage only to find out that she isn't home. That doesn't stop them from staying over and as the evening progresses it becomes evident that Jan has his eye on Arron. Arron has never thought about other men in the romantic sense, but when Jan asks a favor of him on the eve of their departure to Erephonia, he doesn't hesitate to say yes.

They spend a night at Rosebutt, the finest of **Nortenmoor's** brothels, but even though coming there was Jan's idea, enjoying the girl is left to Arron alone. Jan's hidden agenda unravels in the morning when he finally dares to approach Arron with the excuse of studying the curious birthmark he has on his chest, like a coin engraved with runes, just under his skin. They make love in the frail glow of dawn and start the journey to Erephonia as something quite else than friends.

Despite being head over heels in love with Arron, Jan can't stop himself from balking when Arron demands words instead of kisses on their first night at the western side of **Naer Heigir**, the great river that splits the western half of the Torn Continent. It takes many a moons' quarter, and an attack of a giant bear to bring them back together but after the night at the hot springs, they become inseparable.

The volunteers from Aenerhjelm and King Hamar's troops gather at the **Scree Keep**, an austere fortress only a few days' ride away from the **Plains of Midathrir** where the battles are raging. When they arrive at the battlefield,

chaos has taken control, and fear sweeps over Arron. If not for Jan, he couldn't even lift his sword and without the young mage's swift reactions, he would die before even having dipped it in the blood for the first time.

The Vadaskians are winning and in the disarray of the Erephonians retreating, Arron is forced to take an ax in his middle for Jan. When he wakes up, they're alone among the dead and dying, and Jan does his best to stop him from becoming one of the corpses. He ignores Arron's pleas to end his sufferings, puts him in an enchanted sleep, and channels almost all his vigor into him to keep him alive until someone more powerful and skillful arrives to save him.

Jan uses Captain Reushammer's silver wheel to summon Breeze Bitch and compels **Grimwryth**, the ship mage, and his father, to do all in his power to save Arron's life. Jan himself is beyond even Grimwryth's skills of healing, shriveled and shrunken like an ancient man. He wants to die on the plain, under the stars, and with a heavy heart, Grimwryth leaves him behind when the gal-  
leass takes wing, heading toward the unknown.

As Arron wakes up on board Breeze Bitch and learns that Jan is gone, all he wants is to follow him to the Netherworld. He climbs out of the bed of furs the sailors have made him on the decks and throws himself overboard before anyone can so much as hitch a gasp.