Approaching Contemporary Fantasy:
An insight into the fantasy styles and theory

of

J.R.R Tolkien and George R.R. Martin

by

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Abstract

The main aim of my thesis is to explore and define the characteristic styles of the contemporary fantasy story’s narrative structure, primarily by focusing on the works of both J.R.R Tolkien, also acknowledged as the father of the modern fantasy genre,
writer of The Hobbit, The Lord of the Rings and The Silmarillion, published after his death and a more contemporary fantasy author, George R.R Martin, writer of the A Song of Ice and Fire series. I am interested in their narrative structure and approach to the fantasy genre, the similarities and the dire contrast between them, how Martin took the foundation of what Tolkien designed and how he has expanded upon it to create a more contemporary perspective to the genre. I aim to focus and expand upon Tolkien’s own theory of sub-creation, in which he argues that the crucial feature of fantasy should be the creation of what he called secondary belief. I argue that Martin also adopts this approach, but brings a greater level of reality to his creation, seeing Tolkien’s depiction of his world and its politics as being too naïve and lacking complexity. Martin explores issues of power and gender in his work which gives his own ‘sub-creation’ a more recognizable contemporary texture. In my own work, offered as part of this thesis, I have tried to adopt the best of both approaches within my own narrative, For Glory.

J.R.R Tolkien always held a strong fascination with fairy tales, where they originated and how they eventually developed into the fantasy genre we all know so well. He marked their relationship with myths, leading him to investigate the well-known but conflicting theories of Max Muhller and an opposing
theorist Andrew Lang, who sought to categorise fairy tales and their place within literature. However after examining both Muhller’s Solar theory and Langs anthropological theory, Tolkien found that he did not agree with either theory, leading to him developing his own theory about myths and fairy tales, arguing that they were the direct result of what people knew about the world around them and the human imagination. Tolkien could not stress enough how important the human imagination was, he went on to base his sub-creation theory mostly upon this, developing it during his time writing The Hobbit and finalising it as he wrote The Lord of the Rings. This in turn led to the development of his Sub-Creation theory, which is expanded upon in Tolkien’s World by Randel Helms. Tolkien sought to transport his readers into a world which they could visualise and believe without suspending disbelief, a world full of many magical creatures and monsters that were mainly influenced by Tolkien’s fascination with Nordic mythology.

*The Lord of the Rings* and his other works set the tone for the next generation of fantasy writers, many embracing the structure of Middle Earth and creating similar worlds. George R.R Martin, author of *The Song of Ice and Fire* series, was no exception to this; like many fantasy writers that followed in Tolkien’s footsteps, he
went on to create Westeros, a world also set in medieval times, loosely based upon the historical War of the Roses. Martin decided that Tolkien, despite his success in creating a rich, magical and detailed medieval world of Middle Earth, had nonetheless ushered in many other fantasy writes that followed too mechanically, with character types such as Dark Lords being over used. He decided that Tolkien had diluted the trappings of power too much, as he never went into depth into the political arena and what it means to rule. Martin made sure to clearly illustrate that within Westeros, political machinations were rife, as each House strives to outplay the other and one has to watch one’s step or get killed in a moment of weakness. Also instead of a central quest, the characters within Martin’s world spend most of their time separated from one another, scattered across Westeros and beyond, where they would all undergo their own personal journeys, sometimes crossing paths but never gathering together to complete a certain task. After expanding upon the finer points of the styles and structures that J.R. R Tolkien and George R.R Martin applied within their narratives, the thesis will then outline which factors make up a successful fantasy story, factors that I applied to my own fantasy story, For Glory.
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stress enough how important the human imagination, in life he went on to base his sub-creation theory mostly upon this, developing it during his time writing *The Hobbit* and finalising it as he wrote *The Lord of the Rings*. This in turn led to the development of his *Sub-Creation* theory, which is expanded upon in *Tolkien’s World* by Randel Helms. Tolkien sought to transport his readers into a world which they could visualise and believe without suspending disbelief, a world full of many magical creatures and monsters that were mainly influenced by Tolkien’s fascination with Nordic mythology.

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**Questing with Tolkien: Exploring Middle Earth**

J.R.R Tolkien’s fascination with fairy tales, their development into the fantasy genre and their relationship with myths, led him to investigate the well-known but conflicting theories of Max Muhller and his rival Andrew Lang, who sought to
categorise fairy tales and their place within literature. Max Muhller developed and put forth his *Sola* theory, which aimed to classify and tie the origins of fairy tales with natural phenomena that were otherwise inexplicable in ancient times, “such as a hero slaying a dragon was the day overcoming the night” (Flieger and Anderson 2008); hence leading to humanity developing fairy tales to explain the natural world in ways they could understand them. Andrew Lang, on the other hand, imposed his own *anthropological* theory, which stated that the primary and ideal audiences for fairy tales were children due to their “natural credulous nature” (Flieger and Anderson 2008) and that adults passed them on these tales as they were of no use to them.

Tolkien strongly disagreed with both theorists, and instead developed his own counter theory of *Sub-Creation*, which he writes of in great detail in his essay *On Fairy Stories*, outlining that fairy tales were in no way all derived from natural phenomena: “the sprawling characters and plots of all the worlds mythologies and folk tales cannot be crammed into a few nature metaphors” (Flieger and Anderson 2008) or solely aimed at children due to fairy tales being “leftovers of early human development” (Flieger and Anderson 2008). Tolkien makes a plea that fairy-stories not be assigned either to children or adults as a preferred reading audience, but that they be seen
as worthy to be read by adults “as a natural branch of literature” (Flieger and Anderson 2008). He further argued that they were the direct result of man’s capacity of becoming sub-creators “the ability of mankind to create an imagined world out of words” (Flieger and Anderson 2008). Tolkien uses the word fantasy, with its derived meaning of “unreality”, to encompass both the workings of imagination and the result of that work, sub creation, the making of a secondary world” (Flieger and Anderson 2008).

Randel Helms further elaborates upon Tolkien’s work and approach to fantasy fiction, including his theory of Sub-Creation and specifies what makes a good writer of fantasy.

“The author of a successful fantasy will need a strong self-discipline analogous to but opposite from that required by realistic author” and that like realism, “fantasy can be just as demanding and inflexible” (Helms 1976).

He points out that the realistic writer must always outline how their events could have happened to reinforce their credibility, as realism demands them follow a cause and effect sequence, and yet so does fantasy despite its operating in a separate and distinct reality, reinforcing this by explaining that “fantasy
literature is based upon on aesthetic as demanding and uncompromising as any realism” (Helms 1976). Helms makes it clear that the writer must always keep in mind that what happens in the world that they have created doesn’t follow our own laws of common sense; they must adhere to the laws that they have laid out for it just like with mainstream reality. Helms further reinforces this by discussing Tolkien’s essay *On Fairy Stories* and the Tolkien’s theory of sub-creation, where Tolkien discusses that for the aspiring writer of fantasy, they must aim to become a “successful sub-creator”; who creates a “Secondary World, into which the mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is “true”: it accords with the laws of that world” (Helms 1976), leading the reader to accept and believe in what they experience within the narrative. However, Tolkien outlines that this is only effective as long as the author creates a positive form of “Secondary Belief” to maintain the reader inside and not a negative form of the suspension disbelief, as once this factor is broken, the moment of disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic or rather the art has failed” (Helms 1976), leaving the reader back in the “Primary World” dissatisfied with the failed “Secondary World” that lies in pieces before them.

Tolkien further expands upon the importance of how, in order to maintain the “Secondary Belief”, the author must
simultaneously maintain the balance of their structural, internal laws and the limitations of the world they are creating, one that Helms strongly reinforces.

“The disciplined fantasist must, therefore, in order to maintain Secondary Belief, always keep an eye to the structural principles, the internal laws, of the world he is creating, for his is a delicate art” (Helms 1976).

These limitations however present the author with a unique kind of freedom as they provide a massive range of experiences that they can provide through their character perspectives, and within their own world such as magic, battles and encounters with mythical creatures. This is exactly how Tolkien has structured *The Lord of the Rings*: he effectively constructed a world with a set of specific laws that are always followed and are accepted by the reader as essential truth that exist within that reality.

This unique approach to fantasy led him to develop works such as *The Simarillion*, *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, all which had a significant impact upon the fantasy genre within literature, inspiring various writers to follow in his footsteps, creating their own worlds, rich with detail, exotic
languages, cultures, mythical creatures and epic struggles against immeasurable odds and against the forces of darkness.

Helms defines this as “An imaginary world so compelling, so real, that hundreds of thousands of people have entered it not just once but several times” (Helms 1976).

He goes to further outline that, Tolkien was knowledgeable explorer of a number of imaginary worlds “ (Helms 1976). His deep understanding and fascination of Old Nordic tales, such as the epic poem of Beowulf and the Volsunga Saga, served as his main source inspiration for Middle Earth, with many elements from these tales becoming embedded within the narrative, such as the struggle against the dragon Smaug in The Hobbit resembling Beowulf’s own conflict with a dragon whose wrath was provoked and brought destruction upon his people due to a thief stealing a cup from its treasure horde; or the tale of the legendary Nordic hero Sigurd from the Volsunga Saga, who slew the dragon Fafnir and took possession of the treasure hoard that once belonged to the dwarf Advari.

Before being forced to give it up to the Norse God Loki, Advari laid a terrible curse upon the treasure hoard and his
magical ring Andvaranaut, the source of his wealth. He cursed the ring so that it brought upon misfortune and the eventual downfall of the one who possessed it, a curse which was fulfilled in the cases of both Fafnir and his slayer Sigurd; a similar theme that is seen through the malevolence and influence of the One Ring in the *Lord of the Rings*; as the ones that possess the One Ring all suffered terribly because of it. This supports Helms observation that “Tolkien’s world is indeed traditional; borrowing from the power and import of his sources, recasting where necessary, he has created, out of the matrix of a dead and often misunderstood literature, an imaginary kingdom that thought new is not groundless” (Helms 1976).

His application of “Secondary Belief” theory to his own works is quite clear, as the reader is immersed in world that is rich with detail, each scene described to the last bit of detail to the point where the reader feels like they have personally stepped into Middle Earth.

He demonstrated that the truth that the most effective way of maintaining a reader within worlds such as Middle Earth was not through suspension of disbelief but through the application of what he refers to as ”Secondary Belief”, a term that
describes the process of convincing the reader of the reality events unfolding within the narrative of the world’s reality, a reality than can only be maintained through the careful balance of the world through both its structure, and its laws and the limitations that are brought about by those very laws (Helms 1976). It is these very limitations that open up new possibilities and chances of being able to uniquely present to the reader a variety of experiences that can occur in the story through the eyes and experiences of the characters, which help add to the validity of the reality that the reader currently inhabits alongside them (Helms 1976).

One of the core ways Tolkien manages to do this is through his transformation of mythical creatures such as the dragons Smaug from *The Hobbit* and Glaurung from *The Simarrilion*, elevating both from the bestial status that most readers expect from a typical dragon in a fantasy tale.

This is due to how Smaug is revealed by Tolkien to be able to talk and converse with the hobbit Bilbo eloquently, suddenly transforming the typical fire breathing dragon into an intelligent, sentient being and one of the main antagonists of the narrative. In similar fashion, Glaurung, from *The Silmarillion* and *The Children of Hurin*, is one of the first of many dragons bred by the first Dark Lord Morgoth, who also distinguishes himself by being able to not only talk but to use his infamous dragon spell to manipulate and dominate other characters completely, much like he did with the family of the legendary hero Turin Turambar, leading to their destruction from the first age of Middle Earth.

These transformations are viewed as a highly significant factor of what makes up Tolkien’s fantasy: how he famously expresses his own sense of realism upon the reader, by converting magical and terrible creatures to a human level, a factor that Michael Drout and his colleagues quite prominently point out.

“When dragons start to talk, they are transported into the world of humans, of those who possess the ability to speak and converse” (Drout, Michael D.C., Anderson, Douglas A., and Flieger, Verlyn 2009).
Tolkien is trying to associate and create a connection between dragons and his readers; he is attempting “to reflect something that can also be found in humans, hence helping him project a sense of realism that helps maintains the integrity of the world he has created while simultaneously projecting human elements and characteristics that the reader recognizes and can relate to.” (Drout, Michael D.C., Anderson, Douglas A., and Flieger, Verlyn 2009).

Tolkien’s fascination with dragons and the significance that they hold within fantasy fiction is further explored in the essay J.R.R Tolkien’s Dragons: The Evolution of Glaurung and Smaug. The essay clearly conveys that dragons are an iconic concept within fantasy literature, so much so that according to the twentieth century folklorist Attli Aarne and Stith Thompson, the “dragon-slayer story as one of the fundamental tale types found in fairy tales and folktales across the Western World” (Chen and Honneger 2009). This has led to the fascination they hold over many fantasy writers, as they represent a fantastical and unmatched power, especially over Tolkien, who confessed during his Andrew Lang lecture On Fairy Stories that he “desired dragons with a profound desire” (Chen and Honneger 2009). This led to his development and
creation of both dragons Glaurung and Smaug, shaping them into significant protagonists within *The Simarillion, The Children of Hurin* and *The Hobbit* respectively. Without the added human element that Tolkien bestowed upon them, they would have most likely turned out like another pair of stereotypical dragons that would have brought very little to the outcome of their stories aside from their final confrontation with the dragonslayer and not the fantastic antagonists that we know today.

“They became the two of the most memorable literary dragons of twentieth century Western fantasy fiction” (Chen and Honneger 2009).

After reviewing and rejecting the concepts of the both Max Muhler and Andrew Lang on fairy tales and through that, the fantasy genre, J.R.R Tolkien went onto develop his own sub-creation theory that emphasised his belief in the human capacity to become sub-creators of worlds through the power of their immense and encompassing imagination. This, along his passion for Norse Mythology and his fascination with dragons, led Tolkien to hone his craft by works such as *The Hobbit*, which served as a prototype for his successful development of *The Lord of Rings* trilogy.
A Song of Ice and Fire Outtake on Fantasy: George R.R. Martin’s Westeros

As outlined previously, The Lord of the Rings inspired many contemporary fantasy writers to take up writing fantasy fiction, to build upon his sub-creation theory and narrative structure to create their own immersive worlds, a prime example being George. R.R Martin, the author of the renowned fantasy series, A Song of Ice and Fire.
J.R Douglas, author of the article *The Journey and the Destination - George R.R. Martin's narrative method* points out that Martin’s “narrative ambition and scope of its setting, is clearly indebted to J.R.R Tolkien, the father of contemporary fantasy” (Douglas 2014) but he also outlines that aside from that, another of Martin’s main sources of inspiration for fantasy fiction was Robert. E. Howards’ famous barbarian hero Conan due to its hands on action and when he arrived at *Fellowship of the Ring*, despite being partial to the medieval philosophy in the *Lord of the Rings*, he had his doubts.

“He began to wonder if he made a mistake” (Douglas 2014). As he saw that “Robert E Howard’s stories usually opened “with giant serpent slithering by or an axe splitting someone’s head in two, Tolkien’s started with a birthday party” (Douglas 2014).

Martin certainly appreciated Tolkien’s style and the world that he had created but he felt more drawn to the kind of fantasy that was more action packed and graphic, which is what he set out to do with the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series.
George R.R Martin perceived that Tolkien, despite his success in creating a rich, magical and detailed medieval world, had nonetheless romanticised the trappings of ruling and power within it, such as was the case with one of the main protagonists from *The Lord of the Rings*, Aragorn and his ascendance to the throne of Gondor after the final defeat of the Dark Lord Sauron. Tolkien goes on to describe Aragorn as a good king to the reader and that his reign ushered in an age of peace and prosperity across the land but Martin draws our attention to a very interesting fact.

“Looking at history, it isn’t that simple, Tolkien can say that Aragorn became king and reigned for a hundred years and that he was wise and good, but Tolkien doesn’t ask the question: What was Aragorn’s tax policy? Did he maintain a standing army? What did he do in times of flood and famine?” (Douglas 2015)

Martin makes a fine point as the reader really does not know or find out and Tolkien never really elaborates to the reader what exactly made Aragorn such a good king specifically, aside from his noble and good hearted nature, the reader knew nothing of his policies, edicts or laws and how they were affecting the
Kingdom of Gondor, Rohan or the Shire during the Fourth Age of Middle Earth.

This inspired Martin to take it a step further and expand upon Tolkien’s medieval philosophy, showing readers the brutal reality of the trappings of power first hand in Westeros, and the significant consequences of how the decisions of Kings, Princes, Lords and Ladies impact upon the rest of the inhabitants of Westeros. This is what led him to combine elements from the both *Conan* and the *Lord of the Rings*, to shape and design the *Song of Ice and Fire* series into a fantasy that delved past the obvious elements of the genre such as magic and mythical creatures, as Douglas points out.

“Martin’s eye takes in the state of their capital reserves; the security of their armed forces; the condition of their croplands and granaries, the spread of sons, daughters and cousins to neighbouring houses- all elements of hard and soft power that might convincingly be employed in the real world” (Douglas 2015).

He addresses the very foundation of the upper class hierarchy of Westeros, the true reason that those that play the game of
thrones risk the lives of those around them and even their own, for the sake of supremacy over those around them.

This is the reason that within the world of *A Song Ice and Fire*, a good man and king like Aragorn is more likely to face an untimely end at the hands of the more power hungry and ambitious characters around him, rather than a long prosperous reign. Douglas reinforces this by pointing out that many fantasy writers, in a similar manner to Tolkien, attempt to “sell their readers the emotional comfort of a Manichean, a black and white world view but Martin peddles an especially sharp-toothed variation on the genre’s tropes, in defiant shades of grey” (Douglas 2015), George R.R Martin dispels the comfortable, common good and evil, black and white type of fantasy, presenting his readers with a story that blurs the boundaries of both, through events like Lord Eddard Stark’s unjust execution or the assassination of his eldest son Robb Stark and wife Catelyn Stark at the Red Wedding by their supposed allies, House Frey, events that would be totally out of place within Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*; as that would be the equivalent of King Théoden of Rohan betraying and killing Aragorn for his own gain, before he could come to the aid of Minas Tirith or Frodo at the hands of Sam before ever reaching Mordor. It would not only derail the flow of the narrative, but it would have been unthinkable to Tolkien; while in Martin’s
Westeros these events would just be another typical day in the daily lives of its inhabitants and the narrative would proceed without much interruption.

While their approach to characters and their vulnerability to the events happening around differ, George R.R. Martin demonstrates that his approach to the narrative structure and the rules that govern Westeros takes after Tolkien’s Secondary Belief theory, Martin also does not rely upon suspended disbelief to try and captive his readers; instead, he enhances it for the reader by making the events and character within the narrative as relatable, realistic and familiar as possible, focusing on the human drama element over the magic element. This is done mainly through his use of POV (point of view) perspective from various main characters such as Tyrion Lannister to further reinforce a sense of realism, as the reader is limited by the limited understanding and perception of characters like Tyrion. For example, despite being normally a good judge of character, Tyrion is unable to gain an insight into the mysterious Kingsguard Knight, Ser Mandon Moore, whose expressionless features leaves Tyrion at a loss at what the knight might be thinking or about to do next. Marc Napolitano, author of the essay *Sing for your little life*, further expands upon this.
There is a huge temptation to misconstrue these characters as narrators despite the fact they are not telling their own stories” (Napolitano 2015), but also due to the way the characters shape the flow of the story. These characters gain the “illusion of narratorial power” (Napolitano 2015).

This makes his characters relatable the reader; both hold no real power to influence events at all and are at their mercy, much like in real life circumstances.

Furthermore, leaving his characters at the mercy of events happening around them, gives certain crucial events such as the Red Wedding a significant weight behind them as the reader gets to experience the fateful betrayal of the King of the North, Robb Stark by House Frey and House Bolton first hand through the eyes of his mother, Catelyn Stark. Without her firsthand experience and involvement, the event would lack true significance as the reader would then only find out about it from a second hand source, in a less dramatic and almost dismissive manner through the perspective of other characters that have no or little insight into it.
“It is Catelyn’s trauma, madness, and death that grant the occurrence true weight” (Napolitano 2015).

It is this same approach that Martin uses throughout his series to give greater significance to the events in the narrative. This serves as a prime example of how George R.R. Martin has created tension between the discursive authority of his characters and their vulnerability to events within the narrative that many critics indicate is a “fundamental complication of the structuralist approach to narrative” (Napolitano 2015), which follows and largely consists of the Russian formalist tradition of dividing a narrative into two segments, the fabula (story) and sjuzet (presentation) (Napolitano 2015).

The clash of these two elements for supremacy in the narrative rather than their coalescence within it is seen as a fitting metaphor to the power struggles that are the prime focus of the series. Again the infamous Red Wedding offers a strong example of this, as Caitlyn’s death has a deep impact upon the fabula and as outlined before, she has no control of the events that occur: “slow worms crawled up her arms along her arms and under clothes, it tickles, that made her laugh until she
screamed” (Napolitano 2015). This discourse is rendered useless and when she dies—“then the steel was at her throat, and its bite was red and cold”—the fabula and the sjuzet are at odds with one another: “the Red Wedding is meaningless without Caitlyn and the event is meaningless without the discourse” (Napolitano 2015).

Martin also sets out to firmly establish a strict action and event time within the narrative to further the sense of realism throughout his novels. Prime examples of this set of rules are intricately weaved into the narrative, such as if the characters are to call their banners and raise an army they must invest both time and resources to do so; similarly, if they undertake a long journey such as travelling from the North to the South of Westeros they must have narrative time to do make the journey (Douglas 2015).

Martin then combines the strict narrative time with clear and expressive detail of the various locations that are travelled through, which is to be expected from the fantasy genre. It is these kind of details and narrative structure from their authors, that “authors invent richly imagined alternative worlds" (Douglas 2015). This is what Tolkien did especially well, going on on to develop multiple languages for both men and
elves such as the Numenorean Adunaic dialects and High Elvish Quenya and Sindarin, Dwarvish runes, maps of Middle Earth from the First Age to the Fourth and even a pantheon of god like spirits known as the Valar who are tied to the creation of the world itself.

Many fantasy authors seek to recreate their own version of world building, to follow in Tolkien’s footsteps, but Douglas largely dismisses many of these attempts as a “steroidal demonstration of the authors’ imaginative efforts and a futile attempt to dress up tired plotting with exotic accoutrements” (Douglas 2015). However, it is quite clear that George R.R. Martin is not one of these lesser authors, as he does not just suddenly delve into the best parts of the plot; he takes the time to make the journey just as interesting and important as the final destination through the eyes of his POV characters.

“Purposeful, every tavern, road, tree and river in the saga seems poised to divulge some new narrative resonance- and usually does” (Douglas 2015).

Martin also takes the time to unveil the concept of chivalry and its relation to knighthood, of a warrior’s code. This was another strong element that Martin adopted and developed into the
narrative, another aspect that adds to the realism and foundation of the medieval world he has created for his reader. It is also quite significant for my own story as it is my main character, the Nordic warrior Rodrick Stoic’s personal struggle to learn how to not only be a great warrior but a good man as well. Martin presents chivalry through his novels as “clash between high idealism and grim reality” (Hackney 2015), where noble ladies such as Sansa Stark and singers often praise the moral conduct of knights, which are portrayed as “shining armoured clad moral beacons of excellence” (Hackney 2015), protectors of women, the poor and devout followers the Faith of the Seven throughout the seven kingdoms. However the majority of the knights across the land are anything but honourable, with most being “violent, uncouth, dishonest and brutal” (Hackney 2015), a cold hard truth Sansa Stark learnt at the hands of Ser Boros Blount, a Kingsguard serving under King Joffrey, who had him beat and humiliate Sansa at court for her brother Robb’s rebellion. This is a blow to Sansa’s heart as the songs often portrayed the Kingsguard as “ever noble, valiant and true” (Hackney 2015) and yet here was one those supposed gallant knights, beating her without a hint of decency or regret.

The infamous Jamie Lannister, another member of the Kingsguard, is known more commonly as the Kingslayer across the Seven Kingdoms due to his murder of Mad King Aerys Targaryen, who ruled before Robert Baratheon overthrew him.
It is interesting to note that for the most part it is the characters such as Lord Eddard Stark, his son Robb and even Brienne of Tarth, people who do not hold a knighthood- Lord Stark and Robb due to their belief in the old gods of the North over the Faith of the Seven and Brienne due to her being a woman—that actually uphold the very values knights should.

Brienne perhaps is the best example of proficient warrior upholding to a moral chivalrous code within the series, as her honour and loyalty are unwavering once earned. However due to her being a woman, she is often held in mockery by many across the land as she defies their ‘normal’ expectations of a high born lady “almost all who wish she would give up battle, go home and get married” (Hackney 2015). This makes her relationship with Jamie Lannister, once respected and feared as the best swordsman in the realm, now crippled by losing his sword hand, most interesting. It is during their journey to Kings Landing that Brienne slowly but surely starts to have a positive impact upon Jamie, her noble attitude awakening within him his own sense of honour, which until then even he described himself as “having shit for honour (Hackney 2015). Having lost his sword hand, it dawns upon him that any respect and prestige that he once held is gone: “it had only been his prowess that caused people to treat him with even a façade of respect, and now the prowess was gone” (Hackney 2015). It is only through
Brienne’s noble demeanour and actions that he begins to make his slow ascent uphill back to regaining his honour as a knight, with Jamie going as far as aiming to fulfil grudging his oath to Catelyn Stark to return her daughters by aiding Brienne to try and find Sansa so she can take her home.

Brienne of Tarth and Jaime Lannister’s relationship is akin to the main protagonists in my story, Rodrick Stoic and Janna Djorvic as both women uphold key warrior virtues, but aren’t respected by the men they travel with, often belittling them, mostly due to their gender. Much like Jaime, Rodrick sees himself as a warrior of unparalleled prowess, believing that effectiveness in combat is what made a man a great warrior. Both men experience humbling experiences whilst in the company of their female companions, Jamie loses his sword hand and Rodrick is defeated by Janna in one on one combat. Both men, slowly but surely, begin to respect their female companions as their good hearts and noble bearing inspire them to set aside their warrior ego and set out to become better men.

This not only serves to develop the dynamic, personality and relationship between both respective characters but it also allowed Martin to express and reinforce to his readers once again a strong sense of realism; that his world is not one that is divided by good and evil. It is of grey hue much like real life.
“Martin’s portrayal of chivalry is neither sentimental nostalgia nor bare cynicism, but is a relatively accurate handling of the contrasts found in the Age of Chivalry, as well as a reflection of the struggle in every age to be a good person in a corrupt world” (Hackney 2015)

J.R.R Tolkien and George R.R Martin, while they share many fundamental similarities in their narrative structure, their approach to realism, magic and the human element differs vastly and yet, despite their differences in portraying fantasy fiction, they both manage to successfully deliver to the reader Secondary Worlds that they can immerse themselves into without the risk of it shattering their experience and belief in it, worlds that keep to their own respective rules of realism that remain consistent while simultaneously transporting their readers to far off domains that are rich with detail, culture and intrigue, fulfilling their obligations as true writers of fantasy fiction.

Applying Fantasy Theory: Following in the Footsteps of Tolkien and Martin
I took it upon myself to follow up Tolkien’s *Sub-Creation* theory so I could create a world that would not rely on suspending disbelief; rather to draw the reader in and make them at ease with the Viking inhabited world I created, Haljmark. The world itself is explored through the eyes of Rodrick and Janna, it is through their perspective that the reader sees that Haljmark is a cold and harsh land, prone to unleashing fierce blizzards upon across the land, unforgiving to those who fail to tread carefully and abundant in deadly creatures such as the merciless Jothar, blue skinned, 20-25 feet high, bloodthirsty, 20-25 feet tall, blue-skinned, humanoid, with an appetite for both war and men’s flesh. The reader encounters these creatures seemingly alongside Rodrick and Janna, who despite knowing the tales of the Jothar, are shocked to see them actually besieging and attacking human settlements.

Furthermore, it is Tolkien’s Nordic influence that not only helped structure this world but it also inspired me to add in the familiar mythical creatures from Norse mythology such as the wyvern Umbaroth, the Jotunn of course (frost giants from Nordic mythology) and even the well renowned Valkyries, all who have a significant role to play throughout the narrative. This gives the narrative a more Tolkien-like feel to it, not only through the Nordic mythological influence but the way the narrative flows: it feels like a journey. Janna and Rodrick
venture with a band of warriors loyal to her, across Haljmark, aiding those in need. It has a very quest-like structure; but also the journey is so much more than traversing across the land righting wrongs. It’s also a journey of development for Rodrick as he grows to be a more worthy man and warrior.

His first true test comes when he faces off against the Jothar assault upon the small town of Darklyn. He urges Janna from a direct assault upon the Jothar, telling her that it would be suicide to do so; that the only way to win would be to challenge the chieftain for the right to rule the clan. However he belittles Janna, rousing her to anger and she rejects his plan, leading him to set out before the break of dawn, to take matters into his own hands. However the surprise assault upon their camp by the Jothar ends any thoughts of an assault on the giants, almost leading to complete decimation of Janna’s men. This is the first time Rodrick starts to think more about others than himself: he rallies the panicked men around, groups them up and even leads them to kill any giants in their way. His group manages to cut their way to Janna and her guards, who are just about overwhelmed by five fearsome Jothar, led by the chieftain Ygmir, double their size.
The main antagonist, Umbaroth the Unconquerable shares many similarities with Tolkien’s dragons, Smaug and Glaurung. Aside from the similarities between wyverns and dragons physically, they all share the same trait of getting into the minds of their enemies and planting seeds of doubt, enhancing negative emotions, turning them against each other for their own amusement and benefit. In *The Hobbit*, Smaug taunts Bilbo, attempting to plant seeds of doubt that the dwarves were just using him and that he was expendable to them, whilst Glaurung from “The Simarillion” goes as far as to tamper with the memories of Turin Turambar’s sister Nienor, leading her to marry her own brother and causing her to commit suicide as the spell lifts as Glaurung dies.

Umbaroth displays a similar ability, he directly and forcefully attacks the mind of Janna during their confrontation, sowing seeds of hate and resentment towards Rodrick, making him the main reason her son Eigeir dies, as if he hadn’t trained Eigeir and gone back on his word to not teach their children how to fight, he might still live. This twists Janna completely against her husband, going as far to try and kill him on the spot, with only the intervention of their eldest daughter Silvi staying her hand. The powerful compulsion that Umbaroth plants in her mind even leads her to join up with the wyvern’s new army.
Umbaroth marshals Svafrim’s forces to assault Gulbrand, capital of the Stoic lands, knowing that Rodrick had returned there. It is during the siege of Gulbrand that Umbaroth arranges for both husband and wife to fight each other, giving Rodrick an ultimatum: fight his champion or watch his home burn. This is Umbaroth’s ultimate cruelty, as he tries to humiliate Rodrick once more; to have his final death come at the hands of a woman, his own wife no less. He watches the fight with glee, urging Janna to strike down her husband and avenge her son.

However unlike with Glaurung and Turin, the spell is overcome by the true bond that Rodrick and Janna share, as Rodrick refuses to continue fighting his wife and placing himself at her mercy. By humbling and placing himself at Janna’s mercy, Rodrick sparks the love that Janna holds for him, allowing her to break Umbaroth’s hold on her, and also allowing them to unite and make their last stand against the enraged wyvern.

While the narrative holds strong elements of Tolkien, in the sense of characters, the story arc of Janna Djoovic and Rodrick Stoic and their relationship is more reminiscent of George R.R. Martin’s portrayal of the relationship between Brienne of Tarth
and Jaime Lannister that develops during their journey to King’s Landing: both men are humbled, Jamie loses his right hand, which literally defined him as the finest swordsman in the land; whilst Rodrick being bested by Janna in single combat shames him in front of his men and makes him question his own proficiency as a warrior. Both men begin to doubt their worth and capacity as fighters but as they journey with their companions, they both begin to be positively influenced by the actions and noble predispositions of their female companions. They begin to actually help out their companions on their personal quests instead of hindering them or belittling them: Rodrick, like Jamie with Brienne, begins to develop a sense of respect for Janna as a true friend and a fellow warrior.

Another strong element I adapted from Martin is the way that I approached battles in the narrative. I set out to make the combat raw and brutal, quite unlike in Tolkien’s battles, which despite being quite realistic and detailed, are not filled with raw and graphic violence, which I believe is an important factor as it gives the reader a more realistic perspective on how chaotic and bloody battles really are instead of the violence being glossed over. It really helped approaching it like this, as it reinforced the story’s evocation of Haljmark and the Viking warriors that inhabited it, as war and battle are significant part of their
culture it only made sense to encompass that and make it quite vivid for the reader.

Throughout the narrative each battle, from the fateful one between Rodrick and Janna at the beginning to the final confrontation with Umbaroth outside the gates of Gulbrand, offers the reader a vivid, descriptive perspective of the battle, blood and gore included. This is what makes Martin’s Westeros such a raw, undiluted land, violent events and the battles that occur are quite well described, with nothing left out, a powerful element of realism that resonates throughout The Song of Ice and Fire Series and one that I incorporated into For Glory with a similar goal in mind.
Conclusion

The analysis of both author’s fantasy styles has allowed me to assess what makes a successful fantasy narrative, to see which elements make a fantasy desirable to read and adding them to For Glory. Upon a brief glance at both J.R.R Tolkien and George R.R Martin, their narrative seem vastly different but upon a closer inspection, they share many fundamental similarities in their narrative structure, their approach to realism, magic and the human element differs vastly and yet despite their differences in portraying fantasy fiction, they both manage to successfully deliver to the reader Secondary Worlds that they can immerse themselves into without the risk of it shattering their experience and belief in it, worlds that keep to their own respective rules of realism that remain consistent while simultaneously transporting their readers to far off worlds that are rich with detail, culture and intrigue, fulfilling their obligations as true writers of fantasy fiction and through their excellent examples I hope to do the genre justice also.
For Glory

Rodrick Stoic looked out over the battlements to the approaching dawn; the sounds of men fighting and dying were carried up to him by the howling wind, adding its mournful wail to the carnage below. Below him, battle for Gulbrand raged furiously. His last fight was upon him, he knew that, he could feel it in his bones. What fight it would be, to face down the wyvern Umbaroth in single combat, a tale to be told in the ages to come, a fitting end to a warrior of his renown. Once this prospect would have made him smile, he would have given
anything to go down fighting such a formidable and overwhelming foe, as he would have been able to stand tall amongst his ancestors and other great warriors of legend in the halls of Valhalla. In his youth he was bold to the point of utter recklessness, a man who sought glory and renown at whatever cost, a man who fought only for the sake of prestige, who sought to bring honour to his clan and the gods on the battlefield, a man without equal. He had been a serious, no nonsense man, who hardly smiled and who laughed even less. He had no room in his life for emotional attachments to others, seeing it as an unwanted weakness that would only hinder his true potential as a warrior if he had others to worry about while he was out fighting. Being born into the warrior caste and being the son of the chieftain, Clan Stoic expected no less from him and they were not disappointed as he gained much renown across Haljmark.

His victories against rival clans over the years were widely known and praised, earning him the title Rodrick the Relentless, but these titles had made him overly proud, a warrior who felt that he had no equal. That is until that fateful day that he rode out with a small band of his best men to raid Clan Djorvic’s lands to the south, were he was ambushed by men from the clan and their captain, Janna Djorvic, The Maiden of Blades. A sad smile played across Rodrick’s face as he remembered the fierce battle, how he cut down men left and right as his cries of “Valhalla!!” drowning out the cries of his fallen foes, his sword and shield slick with blood as he carved through their ranks, his ferocity unmatched until he came face to face with Janna. The sounds of the battle raging around them dimmed as they circled each other, their eyes never leaving the others even as they both suddenly lunged forward, their blades ringing out across the clearing as they struck at each other with blinding blows that their men could hardly follow, neither given ground to the other. Janna’s furious dual bladed assault was met evenly by his own mastery of the shield and sword, yet so relentless was her assault that he couldn’t launch a counter attack. However the stalemate was ended as he parried her vicious
uppercuts with a powerful shield bash, staggering her. He remembered the thrill of victory as he surged forward to finish her only to learn that he might have an equal after all. She had recovered impossibly fast, ducking under his brutal blow and bringing her blade up to his neck in one swift movement. He remembered the look of triumph that gleamed in her bright, grey eyes and the feeling of complete disbelief that was coursing throughout his body like cold ice. He had lost. He had actually lost and to a woman no less, the shame he had brought to his clan knew no bounds. His remaining men stood frozen in shock as he was forced to his knees, the cheers of Janna’s men booming all around them. Rodrick knew he could never go back to his clan, knew he could never look into his father’s eyes and bear to see the shame reflected in them. He looked up at Janna, her flowing, brown hair slicked with sweat that glistened in the afternoon sun, her fair features calmed and collected as she looked upon him. He suddenly realised that she hadn’t struck the killing blow, they had been fighting to the death and yet she had only pressed the blade to his neck and forced him down on his knees. Her eyes widened in surprise as he began to smile up at her. Her expression swiftly changed from one of surprise to one of righteous anger.

“I bring you to your knees Stoic and yet you still smile?” she said in a cool voice.

“Are you mocking me or have you finally snapped under your enormous ego?”

“Not at all Djorvic, I was just thinking that is just typical of a woman to not have the stomach to finish the job” he replied. “Even now you don’t have it in you to finish me like a true warrior would”.

He saw her eyes flash in anger but it was gone in blink of an eye, she leaned in closer, matching his mocking smile with one of her own. “Typical of a man to think that the only way to win is by the sword” she replied softly.
The smile died on his lips as the answer unsettled him; this woman had wounded him like none other with one simple response, his retort caught in his throat as he knew that she had him. His whole life revolved around killing; ever since he could wield a sword and shield he had pushed himself to his limits, travelling across all the holds of Haljmark, seeking to find the one warrior that could grant him a glorious death on the battlefield. Yet here stood a woman who made that all seem like nothing, making a mockery of his many battles and victories: what did she know of being a true warrior, to die with a sword in your hand and a smile on your face as you were beckoned into the halls of the All Father with honour. He shot her a look that would have made any other man take a step back, but she just returned the look with a bemused expression playing across her face.

“What would a maid like you know of the ways of men?” he growled at her. “Here you stand, my life in your hands and yet you disgrace yourself by holding me captive, you are no true warrior girl, you would be better off in a pretty dress than in mail”.

Her men cried out in anger and advanced on him, swords drawn, but she held up her hand and stopped them in their tracks. She gazed down at him, her smirk making way for a look of pity. “A warrior can have just as much honour by showing mercy to a foe than by taking their life, especially if that opponent is a worthy one, I thought a great warrior like you would already know that”.

Whatever remained of his pride shattered as she uttered those words, he broke eye contact and cast his gaze upon the grass at their feet. The flames of his rage were doused by her disarming approach. His goading had gained him nothing but disillusionment of his own cause. He wanted to rise up and strike her down, to shatter that calm composure, to show her that she truly knew nothing about being a true warrior of Haljmark, to show her how a true warrior lives and dies by the sword. But he couldn’t do it. Here stood a woman that truly
knew honour, had embraced it in a way that he had never done and perhaps never will. He hated and loved her for it. Here stood the embodiment of what he had always strived for and it strangely filled him with hope like no other he had felt before. He gazed up at her again and said the words that he never thought he would say to anyone, much less a woman.

“Show me”, he whispered, half surprised at his own words as he said them. It was there that her collected composure slipped. Her eyes widened in complete utter shock and her mouth was left agape.

“What did you just…” she began but Rodrick mustered the rest of his strength and drowned out her question with his booming voice.

“Show me how to be better, Maiden of Blades”, he almost shouted, ignoring the looks of utter surprise and disapproval from his men. “If you will have me and my blade, and if you have what it takes, I will have you show me what it truly means to be a warrior”.

Silence fell upon the glade, no one moved, no one said anything, all eyes were drawn to the scene unfolding in front of them. Rodrick would never forget that touch of her hand upon his as she drew him up and uttered the words that changed his life forever.

“There is hope yet for you it seems” she said, the hint of smile playing across her lips.

Two years passed since that fateful encounter and in that time Rodrick begrudgingly followed Janna and her men as they roamed across land, aiding the common people by fighting off bandits and creatures alike. Rodrick fought valiantly along with the rest of them but deep down he felt cheated, here he was wasting his potential as a warrior, helping swineherds and farmhands fight off lowlifes and protecting their livestock from wolves. He grew resentful towards Janna, who barely paid him any heed, talking to him only about where they were
going next or if it was his turn to go with the hunting party. Finally the day came where he had enough. They were camped outside the small town of Darkyll, which recently had come under attack by Jotnar, giant pale blue skinned humanoids led by their war chieftain Ygmir, who killed anyone foolish enough to stray too far out of town and had come close to taking the town several times in the last week, with brutal assaults that were only barely repelled and had left the town guard exhausted and severely weakened.

Janna had led her men to Darkyll as soon as she got word of what was happening from one of the messengers from the town that had managed to avoid the giants to send word to Jana’s father. She quickly told them the news and immediately ordered to pack their camp and set off at all haste, pushing them hard all day, finally arriving at Darkyll under the cover of darkness, avoiding the giants with help from the messenger, which led them through the secret path through the forest that skirted the town. Janna swiftly sent out scouts to track the giant’s movements and ordered the rest to set up camp. Rodrick felt a surge of excitement course through his body at the prospect of facing down an ice giant, no man had slain one for over a hundred years, but Rodrick knew that he would soon change that. Finally here was a challenge worthy of his name and his strength. He approached Janna’s tent, and saw her bent over a map of the region, her eyes dancing over it in the candlelight, frantically searching for any tactical advantage they could use against Ygmir and his forces.

“We can’t fight Jothar head on Djorvic” he said as he stepped towards her, ignoring the sour looks from her two housecarls as he past them. She glanced up from the map and stared at him with a hint of irritation in her eyes, which was normally a strong indicator that she thought he had said something stupid.

“Thank you for your words of wisdom Stoic, here I was planning to strip down and fight them bare handed” she replied coolly.
“I think that’s the best plan so far”.

“Or maybe I should get you to do that, think of the songs of glory they would sing of Rodrick Stoic and how he defeated the giants single handed, as naked as he was on his name day, by making them laugh themselves to death”.

“As much as I hate to disappoint you Djorvic, we both know according to the tales that the only way we have any chance here is to challenge Ygmir to single combat for the right to lead. Let me fight him and we can put this behind us”.

A moment passed that seemed like an eternity, she gazed deep into his eyes, her expression briefly flickering from concern to downright anger. Her eye grew hard as she drew herself to her full height.

“No” she replied finally.

“You know it’s the only way!” he growled.

“I said no Stoic!”

“Don’t be stupid woman! You know that you and your men will get massacred, I’m your best shot at solving this right now!”

Her housecarls gave a shout of outrage and drew their swords. Janna’s face darkened, her hands hovering over her swords as she slowly approached Rodrick, who held her gaze firmly, hands clenched in fury.

She drew close to him and composed herself, her hands falling to her sides as she stood directly in front of him.
“All you see Stoic, is an opportunity for further glory, a chance to test your prowess against the fearsome Ygmir, for the people to sing songs of your victory, but you don’t stop to think about the people themselves and that’s why the answer is no”.

She took a step back from him, her eyes still shimmering with a fierceness that could thaw the snow. She nodded towards the tent entrance as she turned back to the map on the table.

“Dismissed Stoic”.

Rodrick almost drew his sword there and then but deep down he knew she was right, he did only care for the tales the people would sing of him, not of the people themselves. He glared at her one last time and turned abruptly from her, walking out into the cold night without looking back. However this still didn’t change the fact that if Jana tried to fight the Jothar in open battle, that even if she gave her life to kill Ygmir on the battlefield, the giants would just pick a new chieftain and resume their attacks on Darkyll; she and her men would die in vain. As much as he resented her right now, he still respected her and the troops under her, he knew the only way to save them from a massacre was to face down Ygmir himself. Without a word to anyone, he slipped into his tent and begun to prepare to hunt down the chieftain by himself at first light.

Rodrick bolted upright, the cries of dying men and the roar of Jothar erupting all around him. He quickly donned his helm and picked up his shield and sword, bursting out of his tent with battle cry already upon his lips. The camp was in chaos; the frost giants had overrun the perimeter and were wreaking havoc upon the surprised Djorvic soldiers, their icy breath snap freezing anyone caught in its path. Rodrick cringed as a group of soldiers met this very fate as a pair of frost giants bore down on them, their screams were cut short as they were encased in ice and then mercilessly smashed to pieces. The giants, having heard his battle cry, turned to face him but he was already upon them, he rushed the nearest one, throwing his shield into
the other ones face, stunning them and sliding right in between his targets legs, cleaving at its right tendon with all his might on his way past.

The giant gave a howl of agony as it dropped onto one knee, its icy blue blood forming a pool around him. Rodrick picked himself up and without hesitation slashed at the giants exposed throat as it lifted its head to cry out again. With a death gurgle, the giant fell over backwards with a resounding crash. Rodrick quickly picked up his shield and spun to face the second giant, barely ducking under the swing of the enraged creatures bone crushing blow. The giant roared in fury with each blow he swung at Rodrick, bearing down on him with a relentless assault. Rodrick ducked and sidestepped each blow, waiting for the right time to strike. He pretended to stagger from one of the near misses and waited for the giant to take the bait. The giant didn’t disappoint him. With a roar of triumph, the giant threw all its weight behind its next punch and was thrown off balance as Rodrick rolled under the blow, jabbing his sword into the giants exposed armpit. The giant collapsed in a heap, its wails of agony cut short as Rodrick plunged his sword into its heart.

The men all around him cheered and rallied around him, bringing down any giants that were in their path with renewed fervour. More and more men rallied behind them as they pushed back the giants’ assault, Rodrick urged them forward, cutting their way towards Janna’s command tent. As they drew closer, Rodrick could start to make out the sounds of Janna rallying her men and the uproar of the frost giants she was fighting. Rodrick broke out into a sprint and rushed ahead of the others; only to be met with a grisly sight. Most of Janna’s housecarls had been decimated, some had been frozen and shattered while other seemed to have been simple pulled apart, their broken remains littering the ground around the tent. To Rodrick’s grim satisfaction, a few of them had managed to take down some of the Jothar; the bodies of four giants lay amongst them. Of the original seven housecarls, only two remained, standing side by side with Janna, Godrick Stormhammer, a tall, heavily muscled man with
fierce pale eyes who served as the Captain of Janna’s guard, who wielded the largest war hammer Rodrick had even seen and his right hand man Lieutenant Aejar Stonehelm, a lithe man with surprising strength that wielded his greatsword in one hand. They faced off against six frost giants, the one standing in front them could only be Ygmir, who was double the size of his kin, wielding an enormous mace that seemed to be made of solid ice, adorned with a great silver chest plate and helm that marked him as a great chieftain.

Ygmir still had five giants by his side, which were ready to finish of the exhausted Janna and her remaining guards, leering at them with the anticipation of a kill. As Ygmir moved to signal them to attack, Rodrick stepped up to the chieftain and pointed his sword at the startled giant.

“I, Rodrick Stoic, Son of Gunnar, challenge you for the right to lead” he declared boldly, the eyes of all that were present entirely fixed upon him. Janna made an exasperated sigh but could do nothing as the challenge had already been made. Ygmir gazed down upon Rodrick, his cruel features remaining neutral as his fellow giants broke out into gales of laughter that chilled the air around them. Ygmir blinked once, then twice and then without warning, gave a great roar and lunged at Rodrick with his great mace.

Rodrick barely avoided being flattened by the giant’s surprise attack and was now on the defensive, as Ygmir rained blow after blow down on him, his mighty mace shattering the ground with each hit. With each hit, the terrain around him grew uneven, Rodrick knew that he didn’t have long before he would stumble and die under a crushing blow. He dived under the next attack and tried to hack at the giant’s legs but Ygmir’s was faster than he looked; swatting him aside in mid leap with his other hand. Rodrick crashed to the ground in a heap; his skull still ringing from the blow, his entire body was wracked in pulsing pain. Despite this, he found himself smiling; here at last was a challenge worthy of his name, worthy of his
skills. The ground trembled all around as Ygmir approached. His body screeched at him in protest as he rose unsteadily to his feet, he glanced at Janna and saw there the contempt that she often reserved for him, but behind it he caught a glimpse of fear that he knew wasn’t for him or her but for the townsfolk of Darkyll should they fail to stop the Jothar. At that moment, all thoughts of personal glory left him, he would kill Ygmir, not for himself but for all those that would suffer should he falter now. He turned back to face his foe, reaching up and casting down his helm, and his shield, his eyes never leaving those of Ygmir’s, which gleamed with amusement and anticipation of the kill to come.

Rodrick closed his eyes and took a deep breath, letting his sword fall to his side. He heard roars of triumph from Ygmir and his lieutenants, he felt the chieftains pace quicken as he rushed forward to finish off his seemingly resigned opponent. He heard the cries of Janna and her men but he tuned them out. He felt the footsteps stop right in front of him and he heard the mace cutting through the air towards him. His eyes flew open at the last possible moment; he caught a glimpse of the sheer block ice descending on him as he jumped aside. Before Ygmir could react, Rodrick gripped his sword in both hands and with all his might, slicing deep into the giant’s exposed wrist, the blade cutting down to the bone. A fountain of blue blood erupted from the wound, followed by Ygmir’s shriek of pain.

Without missing a step, Rodrick pulled out his sword and charged the giant’s legs again and was ready this time. As soon as he saw Ygmir’s other hand shoot out to swat him aside again, he easily ducked under it and rolled under his legs. As he came out of his roll and prepared to slice up the back of Ygmir’s legs, the urge to cry out “FOR THE GLORY OF CLAN STOIC” almost overwhelmed him, his mouth opened to say the words but instead what came out shocked him more than anyone else around him.
“FOR DARKYLL!’ he roared as his sword bit deep into Ygmir’s legs, bringing the mighty Jothar to his knees. One by one, the other giants knelt before Rodrick, their eyes wide with disbelief and shock. Rodrick gazed back towards Janna and her men, their stunned expressions bringing a smile to his face. She met his gaze and for the first time since they met, she smiled back.

Rodrick could still make out her smile as he sat in the darkened room, the very same smile that awakened the kernel of love that lay deep in his heart. From that day on his love for her grew and grew, as they fought side by side across Haljmark. He came to greatly admire her warrior’s spirit and prowess with her blades, but also how calm and collected she could remain, even in the heat of battle. At times he swore that she gave off a faint silvery glow, when her eyes glowed with a fierce fervour, it made him wonder if the tales about her mother were true after all, as only the Valkyries of legend were said to glow with a blazing silvery light akin to moonlight. A deafening roar snapped Rodrick from his thoughts, the warm smile on his face vanishing in an instant. He knew that roar, no other creature that he had come across in all his travels across Haljmark gave off a roar like that, a roar that shook you to the core, leaving you disoriented confused, full of doubt and most of all, despair.

“Umbaroth the fucking Unconquerable” he said through gritted teeth, his hands trembling with rage, the very thought of the foul creature almost triggering his battle frenzy. He had first heard that very roar during the Battle of Ashes, as he and Janna arrived with their force of two hundred men at the Outland Woods, just as Chieftain Svafrim had closed his trap around Chieftain Bjor and his men, who in their frenzy, had pushed Svafrim’s forces back into the woods and had rushed in to finish them off. They all could hear the distant roars of Jothar and the dying screams of men, but above all the chaos, a single defiant voice carried over even the fierce blizzard assaulting them.
“TO ME MEN! TO ME! FIGHT ON! FOR TONIGHT WE FEAST AT ODIN’S TABLE, TONIGHT WE BATHE IN GLORY!”.

Janna’s eyes widened as she recognised the voice, she turned to look at Rodrick, her eyes filled with what could only be fear. Rodrick had recognised the voice as well as only one man in all the eight holds had voice that boomed like the thunder god himself and that was Chieftain Bjor, her father. He gave Janna a nod which she returned before turning towards her men.

“Men of Valamar, hearken to me! That is the sound of your chieftain, my father fighting for your homes, your wives and your children, will you let him stand alone?! she cried over the sounds of battle and the wind, her eyes blazing with a fire that Rodrick had never seen.

“BJOR! BJOR! BJOR! “, they roared back, before drawing their weapons as one. Rodrick found himself unsheathing his own blade along with them.

“With me then!” she cried before drawing her own blades and sprinting towards the forest, in the wake of the loud roars of the men at her heels. They swept away the encircling Svafrim forces that were cutting off Bjor’s retreat, their cries of dismay music to Rodrick’s ears as he cut them down without breaking stride. He slammed his shield into a bearded face and felt the crunch of his opponent’s nose giving way, the man’s shrieks of pain cut off as he plunged his sword into his chest as he went down. A Jothar to his left gave a roar of anger and took a swing at him with his massive hand but Rodrick rolled under the fatal blow and sunk his blade deep into the giant’s leg, the roar of anger becoming one of pain. Before the Jothar could give another cry, the men behind him surged forward, slicing the wounded giant into pieces. Rodrick took that moment to glance at Janna and he felt his heart skip a beat. Janna blazed with a light akin to moonlight, it gleamed of her blades as they danced across the battlefield, leaving trails of a silver glow in the cold night air. The brave band cut their way
through towards Bjor, who stood back to back with his guards, hewing and cleaving anything that got too close, roaring in delight as his axe brought death with every swing.

Two men and a Jothar attempted to intercept Janna, coming at her from three sides, their cries of bloodlust cut short as the light around her blazed, blinding her foes and allowing her to slice them apart, the man on her right lost his head, the other lost his left arm at the elbow and the Jothar had both of its calves shredded simultaneously. She finished the screaming giant by jabbing her blades into both his eyes, never looking back as it collapsed with death rattle.
Bjor gave a roar of delight upon seeing his daughter, casually driving his gauntleted fist into the face of a foe that attempted to hit him from the side with a loud crunch. The remaining Svafrim forces scattered and retreated back into the woods upon seeing Janna and Rodrick, fleeing before their wrath.

“Daughter, good of you to join us, I was afraid we would run out of these whelps to quench our thirst”, he boomed, striding towards Janna and embracing her in an almost bone crushing hug.

Rodrick stood by while Janna returned the hug, her silvery glow softening as father and daughter shut out the chaos of battle for a few seconds. Bjor’s gaze shifted towards Rodrick and immediately hardened, his composure growing colder as he released his grip on his daughter and strode towards him.

“Rodrick Stoic, here to finish your father’s work are you?” he growled as he shifted his axe in his hands as he loomed over him, “Are you here to stab me in the back like the coward you are?”
“I can tell you now Chieftain Djorvic, I always look at my foe’s in the eye before I send them to Valhalla” Rodrick replied, drawing himself to his full height as well, matching Bjor’s hard gaze.

The axe in Bjor’s hand jerked up but before he could fully raise it, Janna laid a hand upon his shoulder, drawing his gaze away towards her.

“Father, Rodrick isn’t the enemy here, Svafrim is”, she said to him softly, “Svafrim is the only coward here and he is the one that truly deserves an axe buried in his skull”.

Bjor looked from his daughter back towards Rodrick and then back again, the fire in his eyes dimming but not fading entirely. His gaze lingered upon Rodrick for a while before he turned back towards his daughter with a reluctant nod. As he made to move to face his men, Janna’s hand squeezed his shoulder again.

“Where is Chieftain Gunnar, father?” her voice growing more serious as she noticed him growing tense at the question, “where are his men? I thought you two had an alliance?”

“There will be no alliance my daughter” he told her, his tone turning hard, “we will make Svafrim’s head my new drinking cup without them”.

Before Janna could reply, he pulled away from her and turned to face his remaining men.

“All right lads, it’s time to clean up the rest of Svafrim’s poor excuse for an army, let’s show there whelps how true men fight and….”

A deafening, chilling screech drowned out the rest of Bjor’s speech, causing everyone to double over in pain, cradling their heads in their hands. Rodrick still remembered as the strong, cruel presence seeped into his consciousness, weighing down upon every thought, trying to wrest control away from him. As he struggled to open his eyes, he felt the ground
shake and trees give way as something massive approached from deep within the forest. The tremors grew fiercer and fiercer as the creature increased its pace, Rodrick could hardly stand up straight, the excruciating pain almost blinding him, from what he could make out, he wasn’t the only one. The men around him were doubled over, faces in their hands, trembling. Bjor and Janna were a little better off, they were struggling against the pain also, both looking around them, blinking back tears of pain. Janna managed to lock eyes with Rodrick, her eyes glistening, still defiant but now there was a hint of fear in them, fear of the creature that could bring down an army with a single thought.

The ground shook so violently that the snow started to shift and shoot up into the air, Rodrick could now hear the deep, rugged breathing of something massive, just at edge of the clearing, just out of sight. He looked back at Janna and drew his sword, his hand still shaking uncontrollably and she did the same. They both took a deep breath and braced themselves. They still heard the sounds of the creature breathing but then it changed to the sounds of what could only be inhaling. Rodrick now felt the same fear that shone in Janna’s eyes. He fought through the pain, running at Janna and her father, knocking them down to the ground as a jet of blue flame erupted into the clearing, lighting up the darkness with a fierce intensity that almost whitened out the snow around them. The sounds of men crying out in excruciating agony filled the air, as Rodrick looked up he caught sight of dozens of men enveloped in blue flame, running blindingly, falling and rolling in the snow, some just standing there in shock as the fire reduced them to ash before their very eyes.

As Rodrick struggled to stand, he caught sight of the creature; the trees around the clearing gave way as it pushed itself into the clearing, its cruel grey eyes shining with delight as it looked around the dying men shrieking all around it, the flames glistening of its dark, grey scales that covered its massive bulk, from head to tail. It lifted itself on its hind legs, unfurling its bat like wings, thrusting its long, narrow snout into the air and let out a loud,
rumbling roar that oddly akin to a mocking laugh. Rodrick, Janna and her father slowly regained their footing as the creature’s voice rang out through their heads.

“Bow before me, for I am Umbaroth the Unconquerable and your lives now belong to me!” the voice said, crashing through Rodrick’s mind like a tide of freezing water, leaving everything it touched numb.

It wanted him to submit, tried to knock him back down to his knees but he was no man’s nor any creatures slave, he was Rodrick Stoic, son of Chieftain Gunnar Stoic, of Clan Stoic and he was a warrior. His sword stopped shaking and he drew up his shield; out of the corner of his eye he saw Janna and her father raise up their weapons as well. As one they charged the creature, their battle cries drowning out the sound of the dying men around them, splashing through the melted snow at a full run. Umbaroth lazily turned to face them, his eyes glowing with bemusement at the sudden assault.

As they drew close to Umbaroth, a surge of Svafrim’s men and Jothar erupted from behind the creature, this wyvern from the depths of legend that had been whispered to Rodrick when he was barely a lad. As their foes rushed to meet them, Rodrick knew that perhaps that glorious death he had always sought was now probably upon them. He gave Janna one last look, a look which she sensed and met, her brown eyes now devoid of the fear that dominated them, now replaced with a sad acceptance. She gave him a sad smile that spoke of a love that would now never be. Chieftain Bjor let out another roar of rage as they crashed into their foes and Rodrick knew no more than the chaos that was the battle that unfolded around him.

Rodrick blinked back tears as took another sip of mead from his tankard, reflecting upon that fateful battle that changed the world as he knew it. The battle became known as the Wyvern’s Wrath across all of Haljmark, as the forces of Clan Djorvic were decimated by the sudden arrival of wyvern, Umbaroth the Unconquerable. Rodrick still remembered his heart
pounding through his chest as they fought the innumerable forces of Svafrim, desperately trying to reach the wyvern and slay it. But their foes, despite being no match for them, were too many and they were soon encircled. As he, Janna and her father fought back to back with the remaining men they had rallied to them, Rodrick knew they had met their match. He knew that this was their last fight, the great fight to end all great fights. But his thoughts were not on the glory that awaited him in Odin’s halls but of the love he held for the woman that fought so fiercely by his side, once a foe now a close friend that he felt proud to die side by side with. As their foes closed in, Chieftain Bjor turned to look as his daughter one last time and gave her broad smile, removing the spear that he had strapped to his back as he did so.

“Go my daughter, live for me, make me proud!” he cried out, his booming voice rising up over the clamour of the fighting around them.

He then turned to face the wyvern, who gazed at him with an air of amusement; which soon turned to rage as Bjor threw the spear with all his might, his aim proving true as the spear found its mark, lodging itself into Umbaroth’s right eye. The wyvern let out an ear splitting roar that brought friend and foe alike to their knees, but Rodrick fought it, seizing the chance Bjor had given them, he grabbed Janna’s hand and led her through a gap in the ring of foes that had opened up most of them writhed upon the ground in agony. He remembered giving a shout, rallying the men that could still stand and them out through the gap. Janna had tears streaming down her face as she ran next to him. As they broke through the enemy lines, they both spared one last look behind them as they caught sight of Umbaroth bearing down upon Bjor, who gave out another booming laugh as he ran to meet the wyvern head-on, his axe raised. Even as the fire engulfed him, Bjor never broke pace, driving his axe deep into Umbaroth’s gaping mouth.
Rodrick slammed down his cup with enough force to leave a mark upon the table, the memory still too painful to relive even now. Umbaroth had not only gone on to kill his wife’s father but had also brought low the reinforcements that his own father Gunnar had brought with him, driving them back with heavy loss. But the wyvern had not stopped there; years later; it had come after them in hiding with his master, the newly proclaimed Konungr of Haljmark and had killed his youngest son Eigeir; who had died valiantly defending his mother at their homestead while everyone else was away. After the battle, he and Janna had decided to settle down, vowing to set aside the lives as warriors, having experienced how abruptly and brutally it can end without being able to spend the rest of your days with one you loved. They had wed shortly after and settled down in the remote hills of Gulbrand, capital of the Stoic lands. In that time they had four children together, Silvi, their oldest daughter, who was the spitting image of her mother and her younger sister Eira, who looked more like him and their brothers Jory and Eigeir, who also had the Stoic look. But Umbaroth had never forgotten and neither had his master Svafrim, tracking them down to finish what they had started.

From what Godrick Stormhammer told him after, a loyal guardsmen who had been one of the few to survive the assault in the woods and who had decided to accompany them into exile, swearing to defend Janna’s family to the end of his days, has been left for dead after Svafrim’s forces had taken him by surprise and had witnessed what had unfolded next. Konungr Svafrim unleashed his men and the wyvern Umbaroth upon Janna, who had donned her armour and stepped out to face Svafrim, swords at the ready. After taking down dozens of his men and avoiding the deadly breath of the wyvern, Jarl Svafrim himself confronted her, who almost kills her as she manages to sever the golden warhorn draped around his neck that grants him control over Umbaroth. No sooner that her blades severed the golden link across his neck, Umbaroth incinerated his former master, shocking Janna.
Her son Eiger’s timely intervention saved her from Umbaroth’s wrath, exhausted as she was. Eiger’s skill with a spear and nimbleness takes the great wyvern by surprise, costing the creature an eye in the process. However Umbaroth’s takes the young warrior off-guard by revealing his mastery over ice as well as fire, freezing the ground around him, trapping and leaving Eigeir at his complete mercy. He brutally ends his life but is forced to retreat as the rest of the Stoic family returns and attacks him.

As the family mourned and praised Eiger’s valour; Rodrick noticed that Janna had begun to succumb to Umbaroth’s powerful influence, growing hateful towards him, spurring his attempts to try and comfort her, turning her blades upon him. Only Silvi’s timely intervention saves her father’s life, as she puts herself between her mother’s blades and her father, leading her siblings to do the same. Janna, despite the overwhelming rage coursing through her, is unable to harm her remaining children, choosing to turn around and walk off into the woods without another word.

Rodrick cast his cup against the wall as he remembered the rage within Janna eyes, how intensely they burned with unnatural hatred for him and his deception. For the next five years, he completed his children’s training out of a sense of duty to them but he no longer felt worthy of carrying his own shield and sword again, his guilt almost proving too much for him. He praised their skill as having surpassed his, giving them his blessing to seek out their own path. He moved away the next day, settling back down in Gulbrand, taking his place at his father’s side, vowing to live the rest of his life in repentance over his broken vow.

However his peace was short lived, as the wyvern Umbaroth, having ensnared and intimidated Svafrim’s forces into his service, proclaiming himself King over all Men. Umbaroth declared war against Clan Stoic, leading to the siege off Gulbrand, which now raged all around him.
“And so here we are at last”, Rodrick whispered to as he rose up from the table and headed towards his quarters, “this is how it has to end; this is how I will make it right, with the blood of that wyvern upon my hands”.

As Rodrick started to don him armour, he once again felt the cold assault that could only be Umbaroth.

“Rodrick the Relentless, I know you are here, come out and bow to your new Konungr, come and beg for my mercy or watch your city burn all around you”, said the cruel voice coursing through his mind.

Rodrick shakes the cold tendrils that are Umbaroth and continues to prepare for the battle ahead.

“No one else dies for me today”, he thought to himself as he took up his shield and sword once again “Today I will send this creature back to the darkness where he belongs”, without another thought, he strides out of the room, sword in hand.

The cold wind buffets Rodrick as he steps out into the battlefield, the gates behind him closing as he strides towards Umbaroth and his personal guard. The wyvern takes flight over his men and lands with a resounding crash, next to Rodrick and draws himself up to his full height, wings unfurled. The wyvern looms over Rodrick, his cold, grey eyes looking down upon him with contempt and amusement. Rodrick defiantly stares back at the wyvern, shield raised, sword at the ready. His eyes are drawn to the sound Umbaroth’s guard ranks parting ways, allowing a lone figure emerge clad in leather armour to step forth; their features obscured by a fearsome wyvern shaped helm, elegant swords in each hand.

Without a word to one another, almost before he could react, the lone warrior charges at him, their blades a blur, their jabs, slashes almost invisible to the both defender and invader alike,
Rodrick barely being able to parry the fierce assault. Umbaroth looked upon their fight with a hint of amusement, being the only one able to track their swift dance of death across the snowy plains as they ducked and sidestepped each other, neither holding the clear advantage.

As the duel rages, it dawns upon Rodrick that his opponent’s movements, tactics and blades are all too familiar. Without a second thought he lashes out with a brutal shield bash; which his opponent predictably sidesteps and swiftly counterattacks, their blade biting deep into the gap of his armour of his overextended arm. He lets his shield drop to the ground, it’s thud as it hits the ground almost drowned out over the laughter and jeers of Umbaroth’s men, their mocking cries washing over him without effect. Rodrick barely manages to parry the next few blows by his opponent, falling to his knees as his foe disarms him, sending his sword spiralling away with a flick of their wrist. Rodrick closes his eyes, focusing on the advancing footsteps of his opponent, his heart beating in time to their footfalls, until they stop right before him. His eyes blaze open as he hears the twin blades hiss through the air, he ducks under their fatal scissor cut and jumps up, slamming into his opponents exposed guard with all his remaining strength, knocking them down with resounding crash.

He pins his opponent to the ground with his full weight, straddling them as he removes their helmet and casts it aside. He is greeted by the all too familiar face of Janna glaring up him; her beautiful brown eyes filled with unnatural cold fury. Rodrick gazes down upon her, his worst fears confirmed, his normally neutral expression giving way to grief; tears running down his eyes as he stands up. He picks up one of her fallen blades and hands it to her, before kneeling before her.

Janna stands there as if petrified, in complete shock as her former husband surrenders, on his knees, head bowed, awaiting her judgment. Umbaroth’s cold, slithering voice urged her to strike him down, to make him pay for his deception.
“End him Maid of Blades, end this liars unworthy life and take your revenge” Umbaroth urged her, his tone soft and almost sympathetic, ringing clear across the minds of all those present.

Janna stood there for an age, Umbaroth’s comforting whispers growing louder and louder, until his voice boomed through her mind with enough force to tear it asunder and yet she still didn’t move a muscle. Her hand gripped her sword so tight that she felt she would shatter the pommel to tiny pieces at any moment. Rage, grief and despair raced through her mind as she gazed upon Rodrick, flashbacks of Eiger’s bloodied face flashing before her eyes, his blank eyes staring at her accusingly.

She felt herself start to move towards Rodrick, the urge to strike him down growing stronger and stronger with each step, the wyvern’s compulsion roaring through her. As she came to a halt before him, he gazed up at her, his face set in one of grim determination but it was his eyes that gave him away; they shimmered with deep regret and love, the same deep profound look of love that he reserved for her and that had remained unchanged all this time. As she raised her blade for the killing blow, he smiled at her, the same smile he had given her the first time she had beaten him, a fearless smile that made light off death. He then cast his gaze down and awaited the blow that would send him to Valhalla. He didn’t have to wait long. She brought the sword down swift and true. Blood flowed freely from the neck stump; turning the snow around her crimson.

She wiped away the blood on her sword and kicked away the head that lay at her feet towards Umbaroth. The mighty wyvern stood motionless, his grey piercing eyes widening in surprise, the whispers in her head had ceased and his men had also grown deathly quiet. A small smile played upon her lips as Umbaroth began to shake with fury until he let out a deafening roar so strong that it sent men near him flying. She gazed down at the head that she had presented
him and felt her smile widen. The blank eyes of one Umbaroth’s lieutenant’s gazing back at her in silent surprise; a hateful man who had been too close for his own good when Janna broke free from Umbaroth’s control.

She turns her back on the enraged creature and helps her husband to his feet. He pulls her in close, planting a passionate kiss upon her lips before reluctantly drawing away to pick up his sword. He turns towards Umbaroth and gives him a mocking salute before taking his place by her side, grimacing with pain upon hoisting his shield upon his wounded arm. She falls into her own battle stance, swords crossed before her. She spares her husband a look, their eyes locking, before turning back towards the advancing terror bearing down on them. A soft ray of light bathes her and Rodrick as they charge forward; their cries of “Valhalla” mingling with the cries of the warriors of Clan Stoic, who threw open the gates and surge forward to join the battle.

As the forces of Umbaroth and Clan Stoic clash, Rodrick and Janna advanced upon the deadly wyvern, trying in vain to strike at Umbaroth’s remaining eye but the wyvern had grown wise and attacked them from afar with both flame and ice, flying away whenever they go too close; yet his own attacks proved ineffective as they avoided his attacks, always on the move. But they were tiring, their every movement growing sluggish and strained, barely able to keep ahead of the wyverns furious attacks. Rodrick knew they wouldn’t last much longer, he knew the only way to win was to lure the wyvern closer so they could deliver the fatal blow and yet he knew Umbaroth wouldn’t dare draw near without knowing his victory was at hand.

Rodrick immediately knew what he had to do but before he could turn to his wife but before he could turn to his wife to bid her farewell, she turned to face him, her eyes locking with his;
the way they shimmered with emotion told him that she somehow knew what he was planning.

“Take him down Janna, make him feel what it is to lose something precious” he whispered to her, giving her one last reassuring smile before running headlong into Umbaroth’s ice projectile.

Umbaroth’s roars of triumph echoes across the battlefield as he rapidly descends upon the prone frozen figure of Rodrick; eyes blazing with fury and jaws agape, ready to devour him whole. Tears streamed down Janna’s face as she forced herself to take a deep breath and tap into the long dormant power her mother had once told her that ran strongly in her veins; the power of the Valkyries of legend. The sound of dying men grew dim as her whole world became the sound of her own breathing and the enraged shrieks of the bloodthirsty wyvern.

She took another deep breath and stretched out her right hand in front of her, focusing upon the courage and love in her heart. A silvery glow began to emanate from her hand, softly at first but the light grew brighter and brighter until it blazed with such intensity that it melted the snow all around her and blinding the enraged wyvern, causing him to veer away from the light. The light finally dies down to a soft glow once more, revealing the legendary silver spear Vaskr, engraved with Nordic runes that emit an ethereal moonlight glow, within her grasp. Before Umbaroth can recover, she throws the spear with all her might, watching it sail through air gracefully. Umbaroth opens his remaining eye just in time for the spear to sink deep into it, causing him to shriek in agony and plummet to ground with a resounding crunch.

As Janna doubles over, the voice of the wyvern tears through her mind once more, oddly calm and collected for a dying creature.
“Well met Janna, daughter of Valkyries, you are not as weak as I thought you were wench, but know this you are every bit the fool I knew you were as with me goes any chance of saving your heroic husband, as my flames are the only way of melting through my enchanted ice, you have laid him low yourself”.

As Umbaroth’s cruel laughter rang across her mind, Janna strides towards the dying wyvern, her silver glow pulsing with each step.

“Consider yourself conquered, worm”, she whispered to him before gripping the spear and thrusting it deeper into Umbaroth’s head, the wyvern’s blue blood spurting out as she does so, the wyverns last dying shrieks echoing across the desolate battlefield.

Ignoring the pain, she looks upon Rodrick one last time before turning to face the surrounding forces of the wyvern’s forces encircling her. Shaking with grief and rage, she plunges right into their ranks, her entire body ablaze with silvery light, her husband’s name upon her lips.

It is this moment that Silvi and her siblings arrive with reinforcements from the remnants of the scattered armies of various holds, catching Umbaroth’s remaining forces between them and the defenders, routing them completely. As the battle draws to an end, they come across their mother kneeling before the prone figure of their father, encased in ice, the bodies of countless enemies piled up around them. Without a word, they knelt next to her, fighting back tears as they did so and gazed upon their father as the sunrise enveloped them all, the promise of new age fresh in the air.
**Characters**

**Rodrick Stoic** - Rodrick Stoic was born into Clan Stoic, one of the largest clans that inhabited Stonefort, one of the eight main holds across the continent of Haljmark, the son of chieftain and renowned warrior, Gunnar Stoic and his wife Alsfana. He grew into one of the most capable and deadly warriors their clan had seen, his many victories against rival clans.
bringing them great glory and earning him the name Rodrick the Relentless. Master of the Sword and Shield fighting style.

Originally arrogant and self-centred, he learned to channel his abilities in more self-less deeds after being humbled by Janna Djorvic and travelling with her across the land. It was during these travels that he grew love and respects her as not only as a woman but a fellow warrior.

**Janna Djorvic (Stoic)**- Daughter of Chieftain Bjor Djorvic and his wife Brynhilda ; a woman so strikingly beautiful, graceful and proficient with a blade that it was said she was one of the legendary Valkyries of legend. She was known as the *Maiden of Blades*, Janna is proficient swordswoman from Clan Djorvic , that took it upon herself to defy customs and take up arms.

Travelling across Haljmark with a band of loyal men from her clan, she made it her mission to look out for the small folk that most others ignored, helping them as she went. She became pivotal in the transformation of Rodrick Stoic’s persona, her kind and firm moral code guiding him down a better path. Master of the dual wielding fighting style.

**Silvi Stoic**- their oldest daughter, takes more after he mother both in looks and in spirit, but has her father’s eyes and strong gaze. Proficient with shield and sword and dual wielding fighting styles.

**Eira Stoic**- Their younger daughter- Closer resemblance to the Stoic line- hot blooded like her father in his early days. Proficient in marksmanship, has also mastered dual wielding daggers.
Jory Stoic- their eldest son- Takes after his father in appearance but shares his mother’s calm and collected nature. He is the more cautious of the siblings, less inclined to rush in to a fight head first. Prefers the shield and sword fighting style.

Eigeir Stoic- their youngest son, the most hot blooded of the siblings but also the most caring and understanding of them. Has mastered the Spear fighting style.

Chieftain (Konungr) Svafrim - Originally Chieftain of Derhelm Hold, Svafrim held bigger ambitions as he sought to rise far above his station, no matter the cost. He rallied his banners and called upon the Johtar, the vicious frost giants that from the mountain ranges of Skalva, and the wyvern Umbaroth, seeking to proclaim himself Konungr over the other seven remaining Holds.

Bjor Djorvic- Janna’s father, Chieftain of the Hold of Valamar, husband to wife Brynhilda Djorvic. A loud, large, boistorerous man whose skill with his heavy war axe is only matched by his love for his family and his people. Has a long standing rivalry with Gunnar Stoic, Rodrick’s father and his clan.

Godrick Stormhammer- a tall, heavily muscled man with fierce pale eyes who served as the Captain of Janna’s guard, who wielded the largest war hammer Rodrick had even seen. Part of Janna’s personal clan guards, known as the Housecarls.

Aejar Stonehelm- a lithe man with surprising strength that could wield his great sword in one hand. Second in command of Janna’s Housecarls.

The Creatures:
Umbaroth the Unconquerable- A large and terrible wyvern with silver scales that shimmered in the sunlight and were as hard as diamonds, his grey eyes glinting with endless cruelty and malice, with the power to dominate the minds of men, this creature descended from the Slavska mountains along with the Jothar, to join Chieftain Svafrim’s conquest of Haljmark. However he had no intention to crown Svafrim Konungr and sought it for himself, leading to his eventual betrayal of his supposed master and his crowning as Umbaroth the Unconquerable.

Ygmir the Chieftain of the Jothar- Ygmir, who was double the size of his kin, wielded an enormous mace that seemed to be made of solid ice, adorned with a great silver chest plate and helm that marked him as a great chieftain. A brutal and merciless specimen, Ygmir led the Jothar on a relentless attack on the town of Darkyll.

The Jothar- Blue skinned, 20-25 feet humanoids with an appetite for both war and men’s flesh. Descended from the Skalva mountain ranges, that bordered the Hold of Derhelm, to join forces with Svafrim, who offered them the freedom of roaming Haljmark in exchange for their allegiance.

Geographical:

Haljmark: Haljmark is a cold and harsh, mountainous continent, prone to unleashing fierce blizzards upon the land that can sometimes last for weeks at a time, unforgiving to those who fail to tread carefully. It’s inhabitants in turn, have adapted to it and are a very hardy people, their Viking culture flourishing where others would of faltered. The continent is split into
eight great Holds and Clans, Stonefort- Clan Stoic, Valamar- Djorvic, Derhelm- Svafrim, Gotlagg- Clan Svalask, Jatlokk-Durinium, Cobran-Clan Tolamarr, Volag- Dalgon and Volarun- Iltar, which are all run by their respective Chieftains. Currently there is no King, no Konungr as the last of the line died a century ago and no other Clan has put forth their claim as to avoid a costly war with any other contenders, as many Clans can barely sustain themselves as it is, war would spell certain doom for them.

Outland Woods- A dense, forest blanketed by snow and treacherous to those unwary of a safe passage through. Site of the first battle against Umbaroth.

Svalask Mountains- Home of the Jothur and Umbaroth the Unconquerable.

References


