

The Sacrilegious Blade

Odar brought his hammer to his forehead and began a soft prayer to his god. “Mighty Tel’near, great Forge Father. I come before you with a task. I pray that you will guide my songs so that I may forge this blade for my friend and brother.”

As he said the last words, he placed the piece of lilac ingot into his double-sided forge and began to sing. The song was everything. It invoked the power of Tel’near to help the forging of the metal go well.

At first, he hummed the tune, moving between keeping an eye on the metal in the coals and working on the bellows. When the alloy had lost its light purple color and become a bright yellow, he grabbed it with his tongs and pulled it out. Setting the searing thing down on his anvil, he grabbed his hammer and began pounding away.

Soon he had a rhythm going and he added words to his song. His apprentice, Ansar, a young man about fifteen years old, joined in, and Odar watched happily as the shape of the blade began to take form.

Odar thought about the design he had chosen for the sword, and besides wanting to make it a point he thought he could give it the watered appearance. He thought his friend would appreciate the flare of beauty to the weapon if he added that specific characteristic.

Singing heartily, Odar began the process of adding more pieces of steel and forging the metal over and over to help produce the layers he wanted to have in the weapon.

Wait, he thought, leaning closer. *What’s this?*

He could see the tips of the billet fraying. It wasn’t sticking together!

Frowning, he put it into the coals to heat up again. “Gods above, I’ve never had that song fail me.”

“What was that Master?” Ansar asked.

“The song didn’t work,” Odar answered.

“But your songs have always worked—”

“I know,” Odar said, cutting him off in frustration.

Taking the metal out of the fire, he snatched a second set of pliers. Using those extra pliers, he grabbed at the delamination and pulled. If it were forged right, it would be welded together so that it wouldn’t come apart. It peeled back so easily that it completely came apart, sending a piece flying off, nearly hitting Ansar who was taking some measurements of an old wagon wheel.

“Blood of the gods! I’m sorry about that lad,” Odar apologized, fetching the metal before it could start a fire. Placing the pieces of metal together he frowned. Why had it come apart? The separation happened as if it wasn’t being held together at all.

“Do you need me to get Tel’near’s hymns?” Ansar asked.

“No, no,” Odar said, squaring his shoulders. “I’ve got a few in my head that I can still use before getting that old book.” And the thought of letting Ansar handle the book made him squeamish. It was more a relic now than an actual book, and Odar’s family had made sure to keep it safe.

Turning back to the bright steel, he tried a different song, singing more fiercely than before.

The sides curled even more than before.

“Curse this thing!”

He tried again and again, each time using a different song from the hymns of Tel’near. But nothing worked. No matter how hard he tried the metal wouldn’t stick together.

When it was time for Ansar to head home, Odar cursed his foul luck and quenched his forge. Once the alloy was cool enough to handle, he put it on his work bench. Night had come, and it was time to get some rest. With everything cool and the fires out, Odar went to bed.

At dawn’s gray light, Odar stepped back into his forge while carrying his own copy of the hymns of Tel’near. Glancing at the delaminated billet he had worked on the day before he wondered what hymn he should try.

He had already sung “The Light of Tel’near’s Forge,” “Light the Darkness,” and “God of the Forge Guide my Metal,” but nothing had worked.

“Song of Summons.”

“Who was that?” Odar said, nearly dropping the book as he looked around his forge. No one was there, but someone had whispered to him. He was sure of it. “I said who goes there?”

The forge was quiet, but Odar felt as if someone else were in the room. “Ansar, is that you?”

The room was silent. Not even the usual sound of songbirds could be heard. He checked around the double-sided forge and checked to make sure that Ansar wasn’t waiting just outside

the door to be let in. Odar scratched at his stubbly chin and frowned. The feeling that someone was in the room persisted, and yet he was certain there was no one else here.

“Must be my old age,” Odar said, shrugging. Pulling over a chair as he sat down at his workbench and began flipping through the crinkly pages of Tel’near’s Hymns, treating them with care as he looked over the hymns he could sing.

“This one could work,” he mumbled, stopping on the song “Hammer Blow and Thunder Roar.”

Leaving the book open on the pages, he walked over and started the fire to both sides of the forge.

The door opened and the sound of soft boots reached Odar’s ears. “Ah, I see your up early this morning,” he said. “That’s good, we’ve got a lot to do today so we best get going.”

“Alright,” came Ansar’s moan.

“I’d like you to finish that wheel you were hammering out yesterday, and today I’d like to—”

“Why are you on this page?” Ansar asked, cutting him off. “I thought this song was forbidden?”

“‘Hammer Blow and Thunder Roar’? Ha, why would that be for—”

“Not that one,” Ansar said, waiving him over. “The page is on ‘Song of Summons.’”

“What?” Odar exclaimed, rushing over to look at the book. On the table next to the purple tinged metal, was the hymn book, opened right up to “Song of Summons.” He couldn’t get his mind to think. How had the pages been moved without him knowing? *Who* had moved

them? Odar had just barely left the book on the table before Ansar had walked in, and it had been turned to the other hymn.

“Why would you sing this one?” Ansar questioned again. “I thought you said it was forbidden?”

“And it is,” Odar growled, trying his hardest to turn the pages delicately to the song he wanted. “It was banned by the servants of Tel’near, and for good reason.”

“But the words seem okay,” Ansar said, looking to the book in confusion. “Why would they ban it?”

“Listen, Lad,” Odar said, drawing Ansar’s attention back to him. “Five hundred years ago, that song had been one of the holiest hymns to Tel’near. That all changed when smithies forges started to burst into flames when they sung it. Since then, that song has caused nothing but sorrow, and Tel’near’s priests declared it to be blasphemous to summon the god in strength to our forge and banned the song.”

“But if it’s banned, why is it in your book?” Ansar asked.

Odar sighed. “That hymn book has been in my family for nearly three-hundred years. I’m not about to throw it away because one song isn’t supposed to be in there.”

“But why don’t you just get rid of it and buy a new one?” Ansar asked. “I’m sure the Monks at Black Top Mount has one or could even make one for you.”

Odar massaged the bridge between his eyes. “Ansar, you don’t just throw away a family heirloom like that. It has to be kept sacred, and safe.

“But why keep it if it has a banned hymn in it?”

“Agh! You’ll understand someday,” Odar said, turning around and reviving the flames that had nearly gone out during their conversation.

The rest of the morning went on silently as Ansar went about his duties chagrined. Odar felt bad about brushing the boy’s questions aside, but Ansar couldn’t understand what that book meant to him.

Walking over to the bench to grab the steel, Odar glanced at the hymn book to look over “Hammer Blow and Thunder Roar” one more time and nearly cried out. The pages had been turned back to the “Song of Summons.”

He looked around and saw that Ansar was still heating up the wheel he was working on, but he could still feel that someone else was in the room with them. Raising his hand, Odar put his fingers together in the traditional way to ward off unwanted spirits. He had never done it himself, having never really believed in ghosts himself, but there had been too many instances to deny that some other presence was in his shop.

“Leave me alone, spirit,” Odar whispered under his breath, turning the pages once again.

“*Song of Summons*,” a voice whispered. With the book still in his hand, the pages flipped open to the “Song of Summons.”

“Who are you?” Odar said, dropping the book on the workbench and reaching for his sledgehammer. “Show yourself.”

“Master Odar?” Ansar asked, freezing in mid-swing, hammer poised over the wheel.

“Why are you haunting me?” Odar called out, his muscles tense and ready to swing.

“Master Odar, who are you talking to?” Ansar called to him, starting to look frightened.

“Come here lad,” Odar said, lowering the hammer but still holding on tight. “I need you to do something.

Stepping towards him, uncertainly, Ansar wore a worried face. “What’s happening?”

“Open that book to the song I wanted to sing,” Odar commanded. “Then come and stand by me.”

Ansar did as he was told, nervously flipping through the pages until he found the song. Once he had the book in place, Ansar came and stood beside Odar.

Together they watched until the pages of the book started to turn on their own.

“It’s a ghost!” Ansar cried, moving closer to Odar.

“You’re not wrong lad.”

The pages flipped until it came to a stop on the “Song of Summons.

“Sing it,” the voice urged.

“Did you hear that?” Ansar whimpered.

Odar sighed. “Aye, that I did. Lock the door, Ansar, and keep an ear out. I don’t want anyone interrupting me while I make this sword.”

Ansar did as he was told while he brought the flames of his forge to a roaring fire.

“What are you going to do?” Ansar asked in a quivering voice.

“Well, this spirit seems intent on sticking around until I’ve song that song and forged this blade. Stands to reason the best way to get rid of it is to do what it wants.”

“Is that a good idea, Master? I thought you said bad things have happened when that song was sung.”

“Do you have a better solution?” Odar asked. “I know what I said about the song, but do you have a better idea to get rid of the spirit?”

Ansar shut up after that and Odar continued getting ready.

Starting the ritual with his customary prayer, he put the delaminated billet into the already warmed up coals.

“Master?” Ansar asked tentatively.

“What is it, son?”

“What will happen if we get caught singing the song?”

Odar paused to consider his reply. “I doubt that there is another soul in this town who might actually know the song for what it is, but if the anyone does, then we would be drawn, quartered, and burned at the stake for defying Tel’near’s Priests.”

Ansar’s eyes widened and he kept a better watch.

Odar walked over to the book, reminding himself what the notes were before heading back to the forge. He nervously started to hum the tune, worried his forge would become ablaze.

When nothing happened, he grew more confident and allowed himself to hum boisterously until the steel was glowing white hot. Reaching in with his tongs, he pulled the bright ingot out and began to pound it with his hammer. The familiar motion of his arm seemed to flow with the music, and without even realizing it, he began to sing the words:

“Come my god, come to me.

Tel’near, god of fire and god of steel, come my god, come to me.

Guide my hand when tool meets steel, come my god, come to me.

Bright the flame that lights my steel, come my god, come to me.

Help guide my hand as it guides this steel, come my god, come to me.

Bless my soul and bless this steel, come my god, come to me.”

He sang the song over, and over again. The heat of the forge losing its warmth on his skin, and his arm seemed renewed with strength after each swing. He lost count of time, but soon it didn’t matter as he had the perfect shape of the blade hammered in. The blade was just as he had intended from the start. The only thing left was to temper and grind the sword down so it would be sharp.

“You did it,” Ansar said, his jaw hanging in amazement.

“That I did,” Odar said, breathing in a sigh of relief as he placed the weapon on his workbench. He looked to the rest of the metal and decided to hide it. He wouldn’t throw away something as precious as that, but neither could he allow it to be used again. He also didn’t know if he could use the song again. Just the thought alone gave him a pit in his stomach that told him he shouldn’t risk it. “How long was I working, lad?”

“It’s not even noon,” Ansar answered. “You moved faster than I’ve ever seen you before.”

“As if Tel’near was here with me,” Odar murmured thoughtfully. Rubbing his chin he waved his apprentice towards the forge. “Go ahead and get to work on your wheel, Ansar. Practice any of the songs that you like, except *that one*.”

Ansar nodded in understanding as he walked over to the forge, pulling the crude wheel over to himself.

Walking back to his workbench, Odar closed the Hymns of Tel’near. He stepped away and went to work on the handle for the sword. He didn’t like to sharpen his weapons until he had a handle to hold onto. He spent the rest of the day crafting the handle out of wood and then wrapping it in the best leather he had in the shop, instructing Ansar every now and then if he was doing something wrong, or if he had any questions. Every time he passed his bench, he checked to make sure that his book of hymns remained closed.

As the day came to an end, Odar bade farewell to Ansar for the night. “Remember,” he called out, “not a word of what happened this morning to anyone!”

Ansar waved in acknowledgement as he ran home.

Picking up the nearly completed blade, Odar placed it on his anvil and said a final prayer to Tel’near, thanking him for the majestic blade he had made.

No one else will see it that way though, he thought as he ended the prayer. I used a forbidden song. If anyone ever found out I would be branded a heretic, and the blade would be considered sacrilegious for my use of the song to make it.

For the metal was holy, whatever he had thought before. He had only been able to forge the steel with the “Song of Summons” which in the past had only been used with the most

precious of metals. But still, that would not change the stance of the Priests if they ever found out what he had done.

Shaking his head, Odar went about making a sheath for the blade so he could hand them over to his friend when he would arrive to pick them up.