

Years 9 & 10
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Helheim's Gates

Thruriel walked all the way to the wall of the city of Kingstown, followed closely by his younger brother, Thrundir. Thruriel was the Prince of the elvish kingdom. Unlike his father, who ruled with a rod of iron on the backs of the people, Thruriel sympathised with the lower ranks. He climbed the pure granite steps, the golden sunset turning the granite yellow like the buttercups in the field outside the gate. He walked along the wall, soldiers saluting him as he passed. He placed his hands on the crenellation, watching the sun set to the east. The stars came out, glowing in the night sky with light whiter than snow – apart from one. The soldier next to him noticed as well, and glanced at Thruriel. The both recognised the light at the same time.

"The beacon of Dol-Aramaeith is lit! The dwarves call for our aid!" he cried. Thruriel ran up the main road, making it to the King's Hall just as King Tharinduel exited.

"What is going on here?" The King asked loudly.

"The Beacons of Aid are lit, my lord. The dwarves need our assistance!" said one of the King's bodyguards (which is a very much loathed position, the elves would much rather be in Thruriel's elite private force, the Edhel).

"Shall I assemble the army? I can have the entire army ready to march in two days." Thruriel asked. He knew what the answer would be, but it was worth a try.

"No. The dwarves would not help us when we are in time of need. Why should we help them?" The King said. Thruriel sighed, exasperated, but the King ignored him, walking inside the Hall. The soldiers turned to Thruriel.

"Ready the city for war. Keep him in his rooms for as long as possible – bribe the healers or something. I don't care what you do. We ride for Helheim tomorrow."

Thruriel poked his head over the ridge. Below him, the dwarvish city of Helheim glittered in the dawn light, scarred walls reflecting the sun as red as the blood that covered them. But it was not the walls or the blood that attracted Thruriel's attention. Instead, his eyes were drawn to the thousands of Alendrin (a fierce race of humans sworn to wipe all other races off the face of the earth – and the reason that elves and dwarves no longer exist today).

They were gathered in a huge group, scrambling to fight the dwarves like children scrambling to eat their supper. The slaughter of dwarves caused Thrundir to vomit. Thruriel watched for a few seconds, his face grim like death itself.

"We cannot win," said Thrundir beside Thruriel once he had recovered. "We will all be slaughtered like sheep."

Thruriel turned to him. The whole army grew quiet. All eyes were on Thruriel, waiting for him to make the decision to charge the insurmountable foe, or to retreat back to his own kingdom, to safety, like his father would have done.

"No." Thruriel spoke softly, his voice hoarse. "No. We cannot win." He turned to the army as a whole, raising his voice so it carried to even the rear of the force. "We cannot win. If we fight, we will lose, dying by the thousands, no rank or race distinguishing us. But we *will* do what is right. We will fight the Alendrin, no matter the odds. We are elves! We are supposed to be honourable! How honourable is it to run? We will fight. We will ride down the mountains to the aid of our allies. We will ride to our death to honour our promises!"

The force shouted in approval. Thruriel waited a few seconds for the shouting to die down. He spoke in a lower voice to Thrundir.

"We fight! I need a diversion. I will lead the Edhel around to the East Gate of the City. Divert the Alendrin so we can charge."

Thrundir nodded. They would take as many Alendrin down with them as possible. Thruriel waited in position. The diversion would happen in about a minute. He glanced around, a bad feeling chilling his veins. Something was wrong.

On the east side of the city, out of sight of where Thrundir's forces waited to charge, a large group of Alendrin archers approached the city. Thruriel went pale. He knew from personal experience the danger that a large number of archers presented to a cavalry charge. Thruriel turned to call a messenger, but it was not needed.

Thrundir's force had begun their diversion. The sound of hundreds of elvish horns reached Thruriel's force, howling like wolves for the blood of Alendrin, as Thrundir's army began to ride over the ridge, swords raised. They rode down the steep incline, thousands upon thousands of mounted elves, horses' hooves beating like the sound of waves upon the sea, pounding the ground like thousands of hammers as they descended towards the Alendrin force. The Alendrin archers drew back the strings on their bows; Alendrin soldiers turned, presenting their spears to the incoming force. The archers released their arrows, turning the day into night as thousands of arrows blocked the sun like a cloud during a storm, bringing death, be it slow and painful or quick and painless, to those unfortunate enough to be below them. Thruriel flinched as he saw hundreds of elves struck down by the volley. He turned to the Edhel, his face like that of a mourner at a funeral.

"We shall not let their sacrifice be in vain. Now follow me; ride to the destruction of the Alendrin; ride to the avenging of your kin. Ride!" he shouted, leading his men over the ridge. Hoof beats like the beating of drums filled Thruriel's ears; he dimly heard the blaring of horns behind him; battle cries filling the air, the sounds of elves scarred in heart and soul releasing their anger in one charge at the enemy. Thruriel slammed into the force of Alendrin at the bottom of the hill, sword slashing, breaking bones and splintering shields; the impetus of his charge forcing him through the Alendrin line like a spear piercing flesh.

He was aware of the Alendrin falling back at his charge, and the Alendrin on the other side of the line turning in confusion as they realised that they were under attack. But he could tell that the battle would not be won. His momentum began to run out, and he found himself in the fray of close quarters, hand to hand, face to face combat, where one wrong move could cause his passing from the land of the living.

He stabbed one Alendrin officer in the stomach, sword passing through his weak armour like a hot knife through butter. He slashed at an Alendrin foot soldier, knocking the man's shield to the side, and cut through the opening he created. The man went down, but two took his place, fighting with renewed vigour to revenge their comrade. Thruriel dismounted (his horse was only a hindrance in these close quarter situations), took his sword in a two-handed grip, dropping his shield to the ground. He slashed through the Alendrin, cutting them down like a farmer cutting down wheat with a scythe. Their comrades began to retreat, but Thruriel advanced to meet them. His sword flashed, cutting down enemies. But he was tiring. A dagger almost cut his throat, missing by millimetres, and Thruriel realised that he couldn't keep this up. He knew that the window for victory was closing. Something had to happen soon.

Horns sounded on the ridge to the north. Thruriel paused in his fighting – as did all the Alendrin. Over the plain rode a line of elvish horsemen, 10,000 in number, wearing the royal standard. In front of the force was the King himself, sword raised, face grim. The King's men galloped forward, and the sound of battle started once more as they slammed into the Alendrin like a hammer on an anvil. The Alendrin began to retreat in earnest as the King joined the battle, sword like a blur of light, cutting down all around him. Thruriel saw Thrundir, who had survived his charge with only a few minor wounds, also fighting, using his glaive with intense skill. The Princes and the King met the Alendrin line, clashing steel on steel, sword meeting flesh, blade meeting Alendrin, death coming to the enemy force like the coming of spring. The Alendrin began to ride to the north, mounting any horses they could find. The battle was won. Or so the elves thought.

A lone Alendrin soldier crept up behind the King, bringing his sword down just as the Elvish army called a warning. The King fell to the ground, his lifeblood ebbing into the dirt.

"You were right," he whispered to Thruriel, who had knelt beside him, tears in both of their eyes.

"What do you mean?" asked Thruriel.

"I was a tyrant. I did what was right in my own eyes, not what was actually right. Do not make the same mistake that I did. Be a better King." The King gripped Thruriel's arm. "Promise me."

"I promise." Thruriel whispered, but the King never heard him. Thruriel felt the King's grip slacken, and stood up, tears falling from his eyes. He whispered, "So passes Tharinduel, King of the Elvish Kingdom. *Post insfdh*. Rest in peace."