

## THE LEGEND OF SAINT URSUL Part III

Long ago Aquaterra was much as it is today; a quiet, little shire that is evergreen and everwet with friendly lords and ladies who, luckily, do not mind the constant dampness. But Aquaterra has not always been peaceful.

Even longer ago, before the position of the Champion of Aquaterra was again filled following the disappearance of Prince Ursul, stories spread far and near of the Shire's former champion, the noble Ursul who was turned into a bear by a rather malicious and disappointed sorceress. And with them came many strange whisperings of sightings of a large bear at various tournaments held in the wooded countryside and of how charmed the land seemed year after year.

For Aquaterra, there were no droughts, no bad harvests, no calamities that plagued them through the seasons. The Shire was quite a haven from the harshness of other lands. Others looked on in envy, but all had also heard of a bipedal bear bearing both sword and shield that thwarted the plans of those that would have ravaged the Shire.

There was one, however, that dreamed of either taking the verdant land to the south and west or finding Aquaterra's secret for such success, and applying it to his own faltering barony. So, in order to find either the secret of a weak spot in their defenses, the baron sent his most trusted spy in the guise of a wandering minstrel.

The minstrel-spy was enthusiastically received by the court of Aquaterra where he helped pass the evening with his songs, and when he found information he needed from a few wine-loosened tongues, rejoicing at the news, the minstrel-spy hastily returned to his lord's castle.

The baron also rejoiced, for the information showed him that he could obtain both Aquaterra's success and Aquaterra itself!

Calling his knights together, the baron set out the next day for the green lands of the Shire. He also took with him a man skilled in the acquisition of guarded goods. The party reached the woods outside the manor where the current foremost Lady of Aquaterra held her court at sunset and, under the cover of darkness, the thief sneaked into the chapel between the manor house and the village. Finding no one about, he then opened the compartment behind the altar and removed his prize--the golden box holding the only relic of the Shire's Saint Ursul, the chain of the office of Champion of Aquaterra, that Ursul has worn so long ago.

Pleased, the thief made a quick retreat. As he left, however, he was spotted by a young peasant woman come to observe some special devotions in the chapel. She recognized the box in his hands glittering in the moonlight.

As the thief went to rejoin the baron, the peasant woman went to tell the current Lady of Aquaterra what she had seen. Curious at the implication of the girl's words, the Lady immediately sent her great force after the man that would dare rob the Shire of its relic--all two of her knights: Sir Good and the archer, Sir Dark. Though few, the knights were brave. They were bold. They were noble. They were chivalrous. They were dashing. They were surrounded.

Having known of the Shire's limited force, the baron has set a trap. Unfortunately for the Aquaterrans, they had fallen into it and faced twenty-to-two odds.

Just as it seemed to be the end of the gallant knights, there was a great crash of thunder from the cloudless sky, and, in a burst of light, an armored bear appeared holding a sword and shield most terrible to behold. The baron and his men broke and ran, but the bear outran their swiftest steeds and cut down the thief who still held the relic.

Taking the box, the bear turned to the Aquaterrans. He told them to return to their mistress and tell her that the chain would never have its influence leave the Shire for he would keep it, and he would also take care of the baron. They did as they were bade, and the land accepted the loss of the relic. Of the baron, nothing more was ever heard, and his son took control of those lands which the baron held, leaving Aquaterra alone.

*~Chronicled by Dianna of the Silver Shore*