

# ***The Ballad of Aedla Ironheart***

*In which Aedla the Blessed and Aldar the Defender save the dwarven realm<sup>1</sup>.*



On a fateful winter's day,  
Nestled in the mountains deep,  
A breathless Countess Ironheart  
Did rock her newborn babe to sleep.

***The story of that babe we teach  
With honor and with pride,  
For only from her sacrifice  
Do we still here reside.***

Aedla was a clever child,  
And took to math and reading.  
Her parents hoped this was a sign  
Of skill to come in leading.

As quickly as she learned, she grew  
As strong as any brother,  
And soon the only match she made  
In swordplay was her mother.

She loved the timeless ritual,  
The lightness of her feet,  
When opposite a rival she  
Danced in combat to unseat.

Though many came to know her  
By the age of twenty years,  
She strove to live with honor and  
Be humble towards her peers.

Her father saw that without challenge  
Combat lost its glamour.  
He placed his bellows in her hands  
And bade her choose a hammer.

“My daughter you are without doubt  
A master of your craft,  
But can you craft your mastery  
From bronze or iron shaft?”

And so did Aedla bend to forge  
To shape her heart to blade,  
For mirror of the mountain's soul  
The elegance of iron made.



What purpose she was not aware  
To which she'd bring these skills to bear.  
But Fate's decree  
Was only she  
Could save her kingdom from despair.



Beyond the mountainsides of Crom  
The distant sound of drums,  
Along their allies' borders told  
That war was soon to come.

To the east Midaran lay,  
And south the mighty Telmor,  
And both would call upon the dwarves  
For weapon and for armor.

So Croman smiths took hammers up  
And lit their forges bright,  
And bent to work for allies all  
Preparing them to fight.

For to their borders massive hordes  
Of orcs and giants came.  
Lead by one from hell himself,  
And Graylorn was his name.

Tall as any giant lord  
And strong as oxen ten,  
With scars and glowing eyes that  
Stopped the very hearts of men.

A terror to behold was he,  
An orcan warlord's son,  
Abandoned to the mortal world  
His demon mother shunned.

Fueled by anger from his fate,  
He vowed to make his way  
Back into the hellmouth from  
Which he was cast away.

He swept like fire 'cross the plains  
And 'fore aid could arrive,  
Telmor fell in three days time-  
No gnomes were left alive.

No time for tears had dwarves and men,  
For onward marched the horde.  
Midaran, clad in dwarven steel,  
Said prayers on shield and sword.

As the horde approached the gates  
They steadied sword and spear.  
They waited with their arrows notched  
Till horn blast did they hear.

The bloody battle raged for days  
With hope in short supply,  
When at last the tide was turned  
Did evil they defy.

Alas! They did not realize  
A decoy was the fight,  
And Graylorn and his henchmen  
Had the dwarven realm in sight.

The attack was unexpected  
For few had ever tried  
To breach ancient the magic shield  
That guarded dwarves inside.

Deep within the mountain  
Drawing magic from below,  
The Heart of Stone lay always  
And its power slowly grows.

In times of war it sets alight  
The runes of city walls.  
No mortal magic is enough to  
Gain entrance to their halls.

But godlike were his powers, for  
This demon was not mortal.  
The Heart he sought to feed upon  
To open up hell's portal.

At the threshold of the caves  
The barrier shined blue,  
But Graylorn touched the runes whose  
Power into him he drew.



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A taste of victory, he laughed-  
The barrier shrunk back,  
And so he did he begin descent  
To Crom where he'd attack.

***But worry not, my readers dear,  
Though dire this may sound-  
The gods did not forsake us, for  
A hero they'd already found.***

That very moment triumph set  
A quiver through her palm,  
As from the fire Aedla pulled  
The finest sword in Crom.

"I shall name you Aldar,  
Defender of the weak  
And protector of the dwarven realm-  
An ally do I seek."

"This duty I accept from you,"  
A solemn oath it swore.  
"For you are my creator<sup>2</sup> and  
There's evil at your door."



That night as Aedla tried to rest  
In dream did shine upon her breast  
A holy light  
Of divine rite  
And Aedla Ironheart was Blessed.



### Part 3

When Aedla woke to hear the news  
That Graylorn'd broken through  
She donned her armor and set out  
With Aldar to pursue.

The city was in shambles and  
The streets were colored red.  
The smoke was thick where hellfire burned

The bodies of the dead.

"My lady," called a soldier near  
"Thank gods you've come to aid.  
Most are in the inner holds where  
Runes have yet to fade."

"But fire burns all but our walls  
Leaving naught to breathe-  
His orcs are like to follow  
And I fear we're stuck beneath."

She said "Go search for others  
And give hope to those who hide.  
Prepare to fight just as you've trained  
And Graylorn I will find."

Our heroes followed in the path  
Of devastation left.  
The city center, eerily,  
Of noise was now bereft.

Past the market caverns over  
crumpled gates they leapt,  
Entering the palace where  
The royal princes wept.

"The queen is dead," the eldest said.  
"And no longer can we fight.  
Take the western corridor  
To crystal gardens white."

They pressed a key to Aedla's palm  
And bade her to make haste.  
"All the realm depends on you,  
There is no time to waste."

In the crystal garden Aedla  
Stopped to say a prayer  
And restore her mind and body  
For the battle to prepare.

"Are you ready?" Aedla said.  
"Today may be our end."  
And Aldar said, "I've faith that we will  
Make it through, my friend."

Through an unmarked door they stepped  
Into the Hall of Shields<sup>3</sup>.  
Six more doors portrayed the many  
Gifts a soldier wields.

“The runes are stronger near the Stone,  
According to the lore.  
They’ll test us, and the demon too,  
To reach the bottom floor.”

“Whichever door we choose  
Will give us temporary bane,  
But in our final battle  
An advantage we will gain.”

The Hammer’s door was broken in  
Unhinged by demon’s wrath,  
So Aedla made the wiser choice  
Unlocking Owl’s path.

And so did they begin descent,  
Each floor brought challenge new.  
They looked to each the other’s back  
To help each other through.

Traversing cliffs and crumbling stairs  
They passed through caverns black.  
Through deadly traps they found their way  
Still on the demon’s track.

They fought a guardian of light,  
On shining wings it blurred.  
And though a wound did Aedla take  
It healed with Aldar’s word.

A voice addressed them questioning,  
And then appeared a wraith.  
The answer Aedla was not sure,  
But Aldar said, “Have faith.”

They lost their way encircling  
The runes within a hall,  
And found it once again behind  
The visage of a wall.

When finally the bottom reached  
They tried to swallow fear.  
“Let us slow,” said Aldar. “I can  
Sense his presence near.”



Our heroes, it did not elude  
This crux in time they must conclude.  
As gods looked on,  
With faces drawn  
And dwarves in hiding were subdued.



Aedla set her jaw and the doors  
She opened wide.  
She faced her<sup>4</sup> demon squarely,  
As bravely she decried:

“Evil one! Your time is up!  
Its power you may leech,  
But without blessing from the dwarves  
The Stone you’ll never reach.”

His orcan jeer was jarring as  
He laughed at her resolve.  
“Foolish dwarf,” he growled  
“To be needlessly involved.”

“You have no hope to stop me, your  
Entire world I’ll quell.  
For with this stolen magic I  
Call forth the gates of hell.”

His talons rent the very air  
With sound of searing heat,  
And as the blaze of fire grew  
His homeland did he greet.

Amongst the flames did Aedla say  
A prayer of fortitude,  
And watched with open horror as  
The tear between worlds grew.

She circled round her enemy  
With Aldar at the ready.  
The demon they engaged as one, with  
Hand and mind both steady.

He lunged at her with talons but  
She deftly raised her shield<sup>5</sup>.  
Though with unearthly strength he pressed,  
Her ground she would not yield.

They broke and three more slashes she  
Was able to elude,  
For Aedla was, in combat, truly  
Nothing if not shrewd.

Graylorn was impulsive and he  
Lacked in self-restraint.  
And Aedla waited patiently to  
Choose her time to feint.

She ducked his fi'ry breath and  
Shifted as if to arrest,  
But brought the sword full round to strike  
A blow across his chest.

The demon roared with anger and  
The fire began to spread.  
The chamber walls were vanishing with  
Brimstone in their stead.

She was distracted briefly as  
The flames licked at her feet.  
He took her shield within his grasp,  
Now glowing with his heat.

Bearing down with godlike strength  
He forced her to the ground.  
Rolling, she abandoned it, new  
Footing safely found.

He came at her, relentless, as  
She tried to get ahead,  
But 'cross her back his talons ripped  
And painfully she bled.

A warrior was she, but there  
Was none like him she'd fought.  
He beat her back into the flames  
Until her tunic caught.

To quench the flame she took a risk and  
To the side she tumbled.  
She slashed his ankle as she rolled so  
Causing him to stumble.

As he regained his footing it  
Gave Aedla time to stand  
But with his reach upon her arm  
A blow did he still land.

As sweat and blood ran down her side  
Aldar felt her slow.  
He mustered his remaining strength to  
Try to stem the flow.

One way or other, Aedla knew, the  
Battle's end was near.  
She focused on defense while trying  
To her mind make clear.

Her breath came heavy as she dodged,  
Oppressive was the heat.  
She said a final prayer for luck  
To help stave off defeat.

She noticed, then, her enemy's  
Attacks were slightly off,  
The smoke from burning paint upon  
Her shield had made him cough.

Suddenly, a plan emerged, but  
Was the risk too high?  
"I'll have nothing left to lose  
If all my brethren die."

The only piece remaining of  
The place that she had entered  
Were the Inner Chamber doors on  
Which their battled centered.

As she worked her way towards them  
Dodging hellfire and foe,  
She felt the stone set in her torc  
Begin to softly glow.

She grabbed it from her neck and pressed  
It to the chamber door,  
Commanding that it open,  
Crouching low upon the floor.

A brilliant light came flooding from  
The crystal housed within,  
The demon, eyes averted, felt  
It searing at his skin.

Aedla seized the moment and with  
Boot to shield, shoved hard,  
Sending it across the floor  
His senses to bombard.

She charged him, finding purchase  
On some brimstone to alight.  
She plunged the sword into his heart  
*And Graylorn she did smite.*



To the ground the demon fell,  
Around him fading fiery hell.  
The walls returned  
To rock unburned  
But the crystal's light was gone as well.

## Part 5

Aedla saw the Heart of Stone was  
Dark and dull and cold.  
She felt her own heart start to sink  
As she to Aldar told:

“Graylorn couldn’t reach the Heart  
Without a dwarven key,

But still he drained its magic and  
From peril we’re not free.”

“It closed a tear between the worlds  
Once Graylorn we defeated  
But none of it will matter if  
Its power is depleted.”

“If the orcs get underground  
Before the runes relight,  
My people will be forced to flee,  
And for their lives, to fight.”

“Scattered and in hiding, easy  
Targets they will make.  
With no way to gather forces  
Or the city to retake.”

Aldar listened thoughtfully and  
To his friend revealed,  
“There is a way to save them, if  
Once more my blade you’ll wield.”

“I willingly will give my life to  
Shield the dwarven people,  
For that is why you brought me here-  
To save them from this evil.”

“Without cracks, my blade can cut  
Through any kind of stone.  
And since both stone and steel are kin,  
My power I can loan.”

The friends exchanged some heartfelt words  
And Aedla said goodbye.  
She plunged him deep into the Heart  
Trying not to cry.

His life Aldar relinquished, and  
He felt his essence flow.  
And as he died, in resonance,  
The crystal hummed and glowed.

Imbued with new vitality  
And sacrifice of love,  
Bright runes burst forth to make their way  
Towards the dwarves above.

Aedla pulled the sword back out,  
Though now no life it bore,  
Returned it gently to her side  
And thanked her friend once more.



Alone, our hero turned to leave,  
Prayed this was dwarves' reprieve.  
The battle won,  
Her job was done.  
Now all she had to do was grieve.



***And so we tell their story to  
Give them thanks and to remember  
Aedla Ironheart, The Blessed, and  
Aldar the Defender.***



### *Scholar's Notes*

<sup>1</sup>The author of this ballad is unknown, but it is thought to have been written in the late Second Age, between 850 and 1100 years ago. There are historical records that corroborate the ballad's references to the war and to the Orc warlord known as Graylorn, though this is by far the most colorful and detailed description of the figure.

<sup>2</sup>Some scholars argue whether it was Aedla or Aldar to which the text refers to as a hero found by the gods. The primary argument for this is that creation of a weapon such as Aldar would take powerful magic, and no mention is made that Aedla possesses such abilities. On the other hand, Aedla is very clearly blessed by the gods which suggests her to be the hero chosen.

<sup>3</sup>The Hall of Shields is referred to some as a "hero's test." According to dwarven historians, it was built when they found the Heart of Stone to ensure it could not be accessed by an enemy or someone otherwise hostile to the dwarven realm. For this reason, the torcs referred to in the ballad are awarded only to knights, scholars, and other citizens who best embody the principals most valued by the dwarven people.

<sup>4</sup>While the figure of Aedla the Blessed is mentioned in more than one historical record, all sources seem to indicate this song as the primary account. Taking into account the reference to "her demon" in the fourth section of the ballad, some scholars have speculated about whether or not the events were true or merely an allegory. Generally scholars agree that both Aedla and Graylorn existed, but no other records exist that confirm whether or not the latter was demonic in nature.

<sup>5</sup>Multiple historical accounts agree that Aldar is a greatsword, in spite of the fact that the ballad describes Aedla wielding it with a shield. Typically, greatswords are wielded as two-handed, suggesting that the author (unknown) somewhat embellished the battle for dramatic effect or out of ignorance. It is also possible that she wielded Aldar with one hand, given the weight and length of a greatsword are not so much more than a longsword, or that her shield was magical in nature.