

The river Manetherendrelle flowed by the walls of a mountain city so lovely to behold that Durin's folk came to stare in wonder. Farms and villages covered these hills, and beyond. But all those folk thought of themselves as the people of the Mountain Home, the people of Manetheren.

Their King was Aemon al Caar al Thurin, Aemon son of Caar son of Thurin, and Eldrene ay Ellan ay Carlan was his Queen. Aemon, a man so fearless that the greatest compliment for courage any could give, even among his enemies, was to say a man had Aemon's heart. Eldrene, so beautiful that it was said the flowers bloomed to make her smile. Bravery and beauty and wisdom and a love that death could not sunder. Weep, if you have a heart, for the loss of them, for the loss of even their memory. Weep, for the loss of their blood.

For centuries Orcs had ravaged the length and breadth of Eriador, and wherever battles raged, the Red Eagle banner of Manetheren was in the forefront. The men of Manetheren were a thorn to Sauron's foot and a bramble to his hand. Sing of Manetheren, that would never bend knee to the Shadow. Sing of Manetheren, the sword that could not be broken.

The forces of the Enemy meant to make an end of them. Kill the mighty oak by hacking away its roots. As the Men of the West and the King of The Noldor held their counsel, the armies of Mordor descended from the Misty Mountains. But when the Enemy's armies swooped down upon the lands of Manetheren, the men of the Mountain Home stood before it, with their backs to the Manetherendelle.

The host that faced the men of Manetheren was enough to daunt the bravest heart. Ravens blackened the sky; Orcs blackened the land. Orcs and their human allies. Orcs and Easterlings in tens of tens of thousands. At night their cook-fires outnumbered the stars, and dawn revealed the banner of Khamûl the Easterling.

Yet, they knew what they must do. Their homeland lay just across the river. They must keep that host, and the power with it, from the Mountain Home. Aemon had sent out messengers. Aid was promised by the Elves and Dunedain if they could hold for but three days at the Manetherendelle. Hold for three days against odds that should overwhelm them in the first hour. Yet somehow, through bloody assault and desperate defense, they held through an hour, and the second hour, and the third. For three days they fought, and though the land became a butcher's yard, no crossing of the Manetherendelle did they yield. By the third night no help had come, and no messengers, and they fought on alone. For six days. For nine. And on the tenth day Aemon knew the bitter taste of betrayal. No help was coming, and they could hold the river crossings no more.

Aemon crossed the Manetherendelle, destroying the bridges behind him. And he sent word throughout his land for the people to flee, for he knew the powers with the Orcs horde would find a way to bring it across the river. Even as the word went out, the Orc crossing began, and the soldiers of Manetheren took up the fight again, to buy with their lives what hours they could for their people to escape. From the city of Manetheren, Eldrene organized the flight of her people into the deepest forests and hills.

But some did not flee. First in a trickle, then a river, then a flood, men went, not to safety, but to join the army fighting for their land. Shepherds with bows, and farmers with pitchforks, and woodsmen with axes. Women went, too, shouldering what weapons they could find and marching side by side with their men. No one made that journey who did not know they would never return. But it was their land. It had been their fathers', and it would be their children's, and they went to pay the price of it. Not a step of ground was given up until it was soaked in blood, but at the last the army of Manetheren was surrounded in the field beyond the Manetherendelle. Aemon's field.

Orc dead and the corpses of human renegades piled up in mounds, but always more scrambled over those charnel heaps in waves of death that had no end. There could be but one finish. No man or woman who had stood beneath the banner of the Red Eagle at that day's dawning still lived when night fell. In the emptied city of Manetheren, Eldrene felt Aemon die, and her heart died with him. The sword that could not be broken was shattered.

But the people of Manetheren live, the lives of children bought by the blood of their parents.

Now Khamûl sends his bloodied horde up the mountain. In the emptied city we wait. We wait for our doom. We shall not be exiled twice. We will stand our ground and give the children of the Mountain Home the time that our lives can buy. For the hope of Manetheren. For the sacrifice of their sires. For the vengeance of our kin. For our lost home of Gundabad.

*Till hope is gone,*

*Till water is gone,*

*Into the Shadow with teeth bared*

*Screaming defiance with the last breath*

*To spit on the Enemy's Eye on the Last Day*