

The Fall of Argynvost



A nobleman named Lord Argynvost came to the valley centuries ago. He was not any nobleman, but a wealthy Silver Dragon, leading a life in disguise as a nobleman. He was close friends with the Fey, who took care of the land, and he would often visit with them and pay tribute.

Argynvost learned of military forces on the rise and surmised that war was on the horizon. When Argynvost learned of the Amber Temple, which was a repository of Dark Powers, he grew concerned. For if the Dark Powers imprisoned within the Amber Temple were to fall into the wrong hands, or worse, were set free, the valley was doomed. The wizards who served as guardians of the Amber Temple would need help if an army attempted to besiege them.

He volunteered himself to make sure that whatever was trapped inside the Amber Temple would not be allowed to escape. He hired the fabled Ursari stone masons to build his fortified mansion, Argynvostholt, and to build the Gates at Tsolenka Pass, to guard against those wishing to travel into the mountains in search of the Amber Temple.

Argynvost was extraordinarily wealthy and reached out to the Order of the Dragon and paid a huge tribute, to earn the favor of a small contingent of paladin knights. They became a chapter of the Order of the Dragon, known as the Order of the Silver Dragon.

Argynvost's Knights were to protect the lands of Barovia in the name of the Order of the Dragon and serve, along with the Shield Maidens, as the guards of Tsolenka Pass, with Lord Argynvost as their liege and lord. Their true secret objective, of course, was to protect the Amber Temple at all costs.

As the Great War broke out, a young prince, leading his forces to conquer the land, was driven off by the Order of the Silver Dragon. The young prince and his army were no match for Argynvost and his contingent of paladin knights.

The young prince learned of Argynvost's secret; he was a Silver Dragon. The prince fooled Argynvost into exposing his true nature as a Silver Dragon, by setting a trap and luring away his paladin knights, leaving Argynvost alone with only one brave knight. The young prince slew Argynvost the dragon, had his corpse hacked to pieces, and the dragon skull transported to Castle Ravenloft. The dragon skull became the young prince's most prized possession, a trophy of his conquered land.

With the death of Argynvost, the Silver Dragon's magic protecting the paladin knights quickly dissipated. The paladin knights rushed back to Argynvostholt, discovered that their lord was killed, and that the young prince was waiting for them. The young prince and his forces overwhelmed the knights, who were plagued with weariness and were no longer protected by the Silver Dragon's magic. The young prince's forces rallied and slew the paladin knights, placing their heads on pikes at the Gates of Barovia to serve as a warning. Only Sir Godfrey managed to escape the bloodshed and fled to the Abbey of St. Martikov to warn them of the Fall of Argynvost and the knights.

The dark prince kept the greatest of the knights, Vladimir Horngaard, alive, torturing him for days in the dungeons of Castle Ravenloft. On the day Vladimir was to die, the dark prince told him how he slew Argynvost, chopped up his body, and mounted the dragon skull as a great trophy.

Vladimir Horngaard filled with rage, with his dying breath he cursed the young prince, for he and the paladin knights would avenge their Lord Argynvost.

Horngaard returned as a revenant and swore to avenge the destruction of the order and the death of Argynvost. His zeal was so great, that the powers that be, also brought back the spirits of several other paladin knights, who rose as revenants under Vladimir's command.

The vengeful revenants killed many of the dark prince's soldiers. Astoundingly, since their spirits are trapped in Barovia, whenever the undead knights get cut down, their spirits find new corpses to inhabit, and carry on fighting another day. Though the knights were grossly outnumbered, they waged war for months and slew hundreds of foes. The ranks of Strahd's forces suffered terribly, but Strahd's attention was elsewhere.



Sir Godfrey soon heard that the young prince had discovered the secrets of the Dark Powers. Rumors flew that the dark prince had captured and imprisoned one of the Fey. Sir Godfrey, in a final desperate act, attempted to rescue the Fey in a futile effort to save the land of Barovia. The dark prince, upon discovering Sir Godfrey's devotion to the Fey, struck him down without hesitation. In time, as with the other paladin knights, Sir Godfrey returned as a revenant, serving under Vladimir Horngaard.

Vladimir's revenant knights were overwhelmed with the rise of the Dark Forces. Corrupted creatures and evil monsters sprang up from every corner of Barovia. The war was lost, and Vladimir lost all hope. Vladimir and his revenant knights should have gone to their everlasting rest, but their spirits could not leave Barovia. A foul evil mist blanketed the land, and their souls were trapped forever.

Since their eternal rest was denied and with little else to do, Vladimir set his knights to take vengeance, killing the dark prince's agents and anyone else who might help the dark prince. Centuries passed and the knights became consumed by hatred and have lost their honor and nobility to wrath and hostility. Their redemption hinges on whether Vladimir can set aside that hatred. It is said that the undead knight can be found brooding in the ruins of Argynvostholt yet today.



The spirit of the dragon Argynvost is not at rest, either. He can sense that the knights have been corrupted, and he reaches out to those he deems worthy in their dreams, hoping that they will help the knights find peace.

According to the dreams, Vladimir's spirit may yet find its rest if the dragon's skull is returned. In the dreams, the dragon's skull is returned to its rightful place in the mausoleum of Argynvostholt. Then the dragon's essence will ascend to the highest tower of the mansion and transform into a beacon of celestial light that illuminates every corner of Barovia. The light of the beacon reaches into the soul of Vladimir Horngaard, wherever he may be and reminds him of the virtues that he lost by the wayside. In the dreams, this causes Vladimir to fall to his knees and weep loudly. Vladimir pleads to the powers that be, to release his fellow knights from the living hell to which his hatred condemned them. This selfless act enables him and his fellow knights to let go of their hatred and find both redemption and respite, if not rest. Their spirits are still trapped in Barovia, along with the others, but they are no longer condemned to seek out vengeance on the living.

From that day to this, Argynvostholt has become a haunted ruin, a former bastion of nobility and light turned into a place of desolation and unrest. It is said to be haunted and a dangerous place. The spirits trapped there are not evil, but they've had their fill of the living and won't stand for any incursion. Few have ventured there over the centuries.

