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## *Alrond and the Magic Fox*

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### *Alrond and the Magic Fox*

#### **Abstract**

Have you heard the story of Alrond and the magic fox? I can tell it to you. After all, magic foxes still live in some corners of the world to this day. It is almost impossible to catch them because they are very strong in magic.

#### **Additional Keywords**

Story; Fiction; Evgeny A. Khvalkov

# Alrond and the Magic Fox

By Evgeny A. Khvalkov

Have you heard the story of Alrond and the magic fox? I can tell it to you.

After all, magic foxes still live in some corners of the world to this day. It is almost impossible to catch them because they are very strong in magic. And sometimes, when such a fox runs through the forest and touches the branches and bushes with his tail, sparks fly from the tail to the sky and fall back to the ground; people call these sparks shooting stars. However, sometimes magic foxes appear among people. This is what our story will be about.

Once upon a time, there was an old knight who lived at Cape Bertoari, and he had three sons. When the old man died, the eldest son inherited the castle and all the land, according to the custom, the middle son inherited the parish in the village and the post of a priest, and the youngest, Alrond, only got his father's sword and an old horse. The elder brother gave Alrond a loaf of bread and a ham for the journey and told him to go away to seek his fortune somewhere else.

Alrond got ready and thought about going to Adtiarn to the court of King Taravon. He, people say, pays the brave and clever nobles handsomely. And Alrond went to the city of Adtiarn.

Some time passed, and Alrond grew tired and hungry and sat down to eat at the edge of the forest. Lo and behold, a fox's face poked out from behind a viburnum bush. The fox looks at Alrond, and Alrond looks at the fox. And the fox said to him:

"Good afternoon, young man! Nice ham you've got there. Would you share a piece?"

And though Alrond had no other food left but that bread and ham, he was a good fellow, so he gave the fox a piece of ham and told him how his brothers had treated him and that he was going to Adtiarn to the court of King Taravon.

"Look," said the fox, "maybe I should go with you to try my luck too? You are a good fellow, I see, but you are very simple-minded, and I am well versed in all sorts of tricks, and perhaps I can also serve you. And when we get to Adtiarn, you'll join King Taravon's guard, and I'll be an interpreter for Chancellor Berengar. I know all sorts of languages: Garegin, Adelnian, and even the language of the Igerulds."

"Well," said Alrond, "it's more fun to walk the road together. Come with me!"

And they went to the city of Adtiarn. Then they came, and King Taravon hired our Alrond as his personal guard, for the captain of the guards was an old friend of the young man's late father, and Alrond took after his father in face, courage, and intelligence. And the fox settled down at the chancery and surprised everyone with his knowledge of languages: the scribes, the councilors, the chancellor, and the king himself were surprised and amazed by the fox's wisdom.

The king had a marriageable daughter. As soon as she saw Alrond, she fell madly in love with him; the young man was also not indifferent to the princess. But it was a custom in the kingdom that not only could the princess not choose the man dear to her heart at her discretion, but even the father-king himself could not, as is the case in most all kingdoms, arrange his daughter's marriage according to his whim. There had to be a great contest, and whoever came out victorious must also receive the princess's hand. And since the princess was a marriageable lady, and the only daughter of King Taravon, and the king himself was already in his old age, the chancellor and the councilors began to bother him so that he would soon arrange a contest and wed the princess to the winner.

"We want," they said, "to have a suitable successor to you—a glorious, valiant, intelligent, and in every way worthy prince or knight; we do not need any other kind of king!"

The king had to give in and arrange a contest. Alrond came back home from the service sad, and the fox asks him:

“Why are you so sad, my friend? Why do you look so crestfallen?”

“How can I not be sad!” answered Alrond “The king has declared a contest, and whoever wins it will receive the princess's hand, and my beloved will become a foreigner's wife.”

“Why don't you take part in the competition?” said the fox. “Although your father was a poor knight, and you are even poorer, your family is noble and your ancestry is not inferior to the king's. Moreover, you are a man of strength and ingenuity!”

“True,” said Alrond, “but I feel that the trials there will not be the usual ones: not fighting with a spear, shooting a bow or wielding a sword.”

“But you have me! I'll help you through the royal trials,” said the fox.

Alrond gave it some thought and agreed. And the fox waved his tail, and golden sparks fell on the young man—and although Alrond had been handsome before and such a daredevil as there were few, now he shone with a magical light, and he had the strength of thirty strong men.

When the time came for the contest, kings, princes, dukes, counts, barons, and knights from all over the West Coast, and some even from the islands of the Archipelago, came to Adtiarn. The first three days were spent in tournaments, hunting, and feasting, and Alrond was ahead of the others in all things: in spear-fighting, sword-fighting, archery, crossbow shooting, and dancing, and he was behaving so courteously—as a true suitor for a princess! But the royal trials were more difficult than the court dances.

It was time for the first contest. And the king said:

“Last year, the Duke Larhelm of Moremont gave me some wonderful seeds that produce a harvest of five hundred, and bread made from that wheat has such wonderful properties that one small piece is enough to feed an adult man. My peasants sowed this miraculous grain in the fields, and indeed, the harvest was unprecedented. But what a misfortune: someone comes at night and eats the wheat. And when I send the guards to catch the unknown thief, they all fall asleep. Which of you, glorious knights, will protect my fields of wonder wheat and at the same time, catch the mysterious robber and bring him to me?”

All the kings, princes, dukes, earls, barons, and knights were perplexed, and so was Alrond. He came home and told the fox about the royal mission. And the fox said:

“I know who steals the wheat—it's the proboscis monster. Follow my advice, get a good night's sleep, and let's go watch the thief at night. Just don't forget to plug your ears.”

So they did. And when at night all the kings, princes, dukes, counts, barons, and knights went out to guard the field, the proboscis monster came up to it and trumpeted his trunk—then everybody fell asleep. Alrond covered his ears, as the fox had told him, and did not fall asleep. As soon as the thief began to graze on the royal fields, Alrond and the fox began to catch the proboscis monster. For a long while, they could not cope with it until the fox jumped on the monster and threw a rope on it.

In the morning, Alrond brought the proboscis monster to the king. The king was surprised, and praised and thanked Alrond. The foreign kings, princes, dukes, counts, barons and knights became envious: they slept all night while Alrond and the fox caught the monster! And they plotted against Alrond, but they did not show it.

It was time for the second contest. And the king said:

“Last year King Aethelstan of Damyria gave me a flock of golden-fleeced sheep. Now it's time to shear them. Their wool is pure gold, but I must say that these sheep are very skittish, and so far no one has managed to shear them. Which of you, glorious knights, can shear the sheep and gather the golden wool and bring it to me?”

All the kings, princes, dukes, earls, barons, and knights were perplexed, and so was Alrond. He came home and told the fox about the royal mission. And the fox said:

“That is not difficult, my friend Alrond. Follow my advice, get a good night's sleep, and tomorrow we'll go and shear the golden-fleeced sheep.”

In the morning, the pretenders to the princess's hand began to catch the golden-fleeced sheep, but they were very quick and skittish, and no one managed to cut a piece of golden wool from them. It was Alrond's turn at last. Then the fox, his faithful friend, sat down on the hillock where the sheep were grazing, took out his flute, and began to play. Oh, if you could only imagine what kind of music it was! All the sheep gathered around the fox and listened to the magic music as if they were enchanted, and now it was easy for Alrond to shear them.

And not only the sheep were enchanted! The clear sound of that music enchanted the king, the courtiers, the retinue, and everybody who were there; they all fell silent and listened as if in a daze. Wild forest animals came out of their holes and dens to listen to the wonderful music of the fox. The lion, the king of all beasts, dared not growl lest he should interrupt the wondrous music, the wolf forgot his howl, and the auroch forgot his roar. Even old Greta, who lives at the Break-in-the-Moat and is famous for the worst character (she can't do without scolding others even for one minute), so even old Greta herself came out and listened to the music. The melody that the fox produced from his flute turned everything into a temple of music.

The King was thrilled that Alrond had completed the second task and doubly thrilled that he had heard such magical music. He sincerely thanked Alrond and the fox, and the foreign kings, princes, dukes, counts, barons, and knights almost burst with envy and anger. And one of them, King Gerneb of Lothirod, said:

“If this knight passes the third contest, he will have the princess, and we will leave unrewarded and even disgraced, and some poor soldier will be higher than us, crowned heads! We'll ambush him tomorrow morning before the third trial and kill him, and thus we won't have to suffer dishonor.”

They all decided to do so. But they did not know that the fox was standing behind the curtain and heard everything. He came home and told Alrond about the insidious plans of the foreigners.

“What should I do then?” said the young man.

“Trust me”, the fox replied, “but just remember that tomorrow we have to both defeat our enemies and to pass the last contest!”

It was time for the third and final contest. And the king said:

“I want my future son-in-law to treat me to a sumptuous dinner in his own castle, and this reception has to be royal! I will not marry my daughter to a beggar.”

Foreign kings, princes, dukes, counts, barons, and knights were alarmed. Of course, they had magnificent palaces and castles in their region—but you can't take a king there in one day, nor can you bring these palaces and castles to Adtiarn, no matter how hard you work! However, the four richest kings hired a hundred masons each and ordered them to build castles near the capital at once—but you can't build a castle in a day! Alrond looked sad, but the fox nudged him and said:

“I'll go and get you a castle for the king's party, and when you go hunting now, keep away from the foreigners!”

And the fox ran in the direction of Cromorgan Castle. And I must say that this castle was owned by a terrible troll, most despicable, evil and cruel. Many travellers who passed by Cromorgan Castle ended up in the teeth of that ugly ogre. But the troll ate humans and not foxes, so our dodger had nothing to fear; besides, the troll was not at home at that time—he had gone out to hunt. First of all, the fox decided to get rid of the troll's servants who guarded the castle; those were gnoll Graw, goblin Grow and gremlin Grahaham. He ran to the gate and shouted:

“Alarm! Run for your lives! Here comes the king with his army and brings with him a hundred wizards: they will burn you all to ashes with their lightnings!”

The troll's servants were alarmed. What should they do? And the fox told them:

“Hide quickly; maybe the king and his army and wizards will not notice you!”

The troll's servants were cowardly, so they left their guard posts without a moment's delay. The gnoll Graw hid in a beer keg, the goblin Grow hid in a wine barrel, and the gremlin Grahaham hid in a cask of calvados (the troll was very fond of calvados). Then our fox closed them all up, rolled them out on the fortress wall and threw them into the moat—let them swim there!

Meanwhile, the evil troll, the master of the house, returned and was quite surprised that his servants are gone and that a strange fox had appeared out of nowhere in his own castle. But our fox was an extremely courteous gentleman, so he had no difficulty in charming the troll. Knowing that the troll is very fond of flattery, the fox began to describe in every possible way the merits of the troll and his glorious fame in all the surrounding kingdoms.

I must add that this troll had two heads, and they often quarreled with each other. And here's what the fox came up with—he repeatedly paid more and more colorful compliments to one head or the other, until finally they got into a big quarrel and locked in a deadly battle. Then the fox crept softly to where the troll kept his sharp, curved sabers, like those which camelmen use in the desert for a fight, and with a deft blow cut off both of the evil troll's quarrelsome heads. And since then, no one has ever captured or killed travelers in those parts!

Meanwhile, King Taravon hunted with his courtiers, retinue, and foreign kings, princes, dukes, earls, barons, and knights, who, as you will remember, plotted to kill Alrond. In pursuit of a deer, Alrond broke away from the entire retinue and was left alone, and then the foreigners began chasing him. Their swords were drawn, their crossbows loaded, and that would have been the end of the young man if he hadn't had his fox!

And the fox, after taking possession of the magnificent castle of the villainous troll and giving orders to prepare a real royal feast, hurried to the forest where the hunt was going on. At that time, there was a very old, dilapidated bridge in this forest. So, when the enemies were chasing Alrond and shooting at him with crossbows, the fox (and he was a magic fox, after all!) briefly transformed his friend into a fox and hid him in a burrow, while the fox himself turned into a young man, just like Alrond—you wouldn't even tell one from another! The foreign kings, princes, dukes, earls, barons, and knights rushed after him, and the fox in the guise of Alrond leapt from his horse and ran across the old bridge to the other side. The foreigners, thinking that their victim was in their hands, rushed after him to the dilapidated bridge, and the bridge collapsed, so they all perished.

Meanwhile, the king was hungry and was waiting for dinner. The fox restored Alrond to his human form and himself to his fox form, and they returned to the king.

“Your Majesty,” the fox said, “Sir Alrond has the honor to invite you to dine at his castle.”

The king was surprised. “How come, Alrond? Your father's castle is ten days' ride from here, and it belongs to your elder brother by right of the entail.”

“I assure you, Sire,” the fox said, “that Sir Alrond has a castle, and a most magnificent one.”

And the fox led Alrond, the king, and the entire king's retinue to the castle of Cromorgan, which had once belonged to the evil troll, and now it belonged to the fox's friend, knight Alrond. When they reached the castle, the king was overjoyed, for Cromorgan Castle was as good as a royal palace, and the reception that the fox and Alrond provided for the king and his retinue there was truly royal. The king was quite charmed, and at the same dinner he announced the betrothal of Alrond and the Princess, and appointed Alrond as heir to the throne.

What about the magic fox? Well, the fox, when the wedding was over, took his leave and ran into the forest; after all, he was a wild animal, although later he sometimes came to visit his friend.

That's it, my friends! Alrond did not spare the last thing he had for the fox, and in the end he became king.