

LotB Episode 61

This Podcast is intended for a mature audience. Listener discretion is advised

Welcome back to Legend of the Bones.

Following in the footsteps of giants, Legend of the Bones is a chimaera, a mix of old school Tabletop RPG, and dark fantasy storytelling.

I'm

As its name might suggest, in Legend of the Bones the dice rule. There will be no rerolls, no fudging the dice, no-metacurrency. The roll of the Bones will determine the characters' destiny, and no-one will be spared their fate.

None shall escape the destiny of bone...

Last time on Legend of the Bones... We learnt that Reynard of Harberg had left Trevance a week earlier, taking a company of the Brethren of the Purifying Light through the Dragon's Tooth Pass to join the mustering rebel forces at Kerow Morthol. On his arrival, he was met by his trusted lieutenant, and Lord Polmear's steward, Maelor who Renard had tasked with recovering the final Hellstone, the Eye of Salethra. Maelor reported that during his attempt, the Eye of Salethra's Keeper, the mage Lamorna, had escaped, taking the Hellstone with her; but that he had managed to capture Lamorna's apprentice, Sirhc.

Back at Penmelkeyn and in the present, the companions discovered a chamber containing four mummified corpses, whom Vaylan supposed were the warden's of the vault. The men appeared to have died of starvation, suggesting they had been deliberately or otherwise been trapped within Penmelkeyn, but more curiously was an enchant torc, placed in reverse about each of their necks.

Deciding not to disturb anything, the companions returned to the entrance hall where they discovered the door to another chamber, that had previously been shut, was now open.

Just as they were about to investigate, the companions were attacked by a possessed creature that used to be the fifth warden. The creature initially used its gaze attack to temporarily incapacitate Laana, who through the visions of Hell she experienced has been permanently traumatised. A drawn out fight ensued, until the creature launched itself at the freshly recovered Laana, delivering a devastating attack which left the Cleric badly wounded, but just as the fiend was about to rip the cleric's throat out, Beric cleaved the creature's head, ending the battle, and saving Laana's life.

[music transition]

Chapter 61, Part 1, Day 61, Evening

Party Status

Beric 49 out of 53 Hit Points

Laana 16 out of 34 Hit Points

Vaylan 21 out of 21 Hit Points
Taalien 27 out of 27 Hit Points

Spells Available

Vaylan has memorised Charm Animal, Push, Shield, Sooth, Revive, Clairvoyance, Ignite and Dragon's Breath

Taalien has memorised Resolve, Poetic Prose, Pitch, Imbue and Lullaby

Laana can pray for 2 first level miracles, 2 second level miracles, 2 third Level miracles, 1 fourth level miracle and 1 fifth level miracle.

Stillness once again settled upon the hall, cloaking it like a shroud, as though the violence that had raged only moments before were nothing but a fleeting nightmare. Only small, strangled gasps disturbed the silence, echoing like ghostly whispers through the chamber.

Vaylan rushed forward, shoving aside the headless carcass of the monstrous thing that had collapsed over Laana's supine form. The cleric's neck was torn and savaged, marred by deep gouges left by the fiend's claws and teeth. A dark pool of blood spread beneath her head, soaking onto the cold stone floor like spilled ink upon parchment.

The mage dropped to his knees, pressing his fingers against the gaping wound in a desperate attempt to staunch the flow. Tears spilled freely down his cheeks, his face a mask of desperation and helpless grief.

VAYLAN: Laana!

He cried hoarsely, his voice cracking with raw desperation as the colour drained from Laana's ashen face. With a panicked motion, he yanked the strap of his pack from his shoulder and flung it toward Taalien with his free hand.

VAYLAN: Get me bandages!

He commanded, urgency sharpening his tone. The Bard dropped to his knees and began frantically rifling through the bag.

Then, Vaylan felt it—a faint, cold touch upon his blood-slicked hand. Startled, he looked down and met Laana's gaze. Despite the horrific wounds raking her throat, her eyes shimmered with an eerie calm, a quiet resolve that defied her condition.

With surprising tenderness, she pushed his hand away from her neck, allowing the blood to flow unimpeded once more. Her fingers weakly found her holy symbol, and she clutched it with fragile determination. Her lips began to move—softly, silently—uttering whispers too faint for the ear to catch.

Moments passed, heavy and tense, and then, suddenly, her eyes flared wide, filled with a light that was not of the world. Her face transformed, awash with a rapture that transcended

pain and fear. The bleeding halted. Torn flesh knit itself back together—muscle, sinew, and skin, all mending with divine precision—until no trace of the trauma remained.

Laana slowly sat upright, her movements reverent, almost ceremonial. Vaylan leaned forward, pressing his forehead gently against hers, his tears now those of relief.

VAYLAN: I thought I would lose you.

He confessed, his voice choked with emotion.

Laana leaned back slightly, her expression serene. She offered the mage a faint but resolute smile.

LAANA: I knew in my heart that the Nine would not abandon me.

She spoke with unwavering conviction.

LAANA: Solan restored me with his grace.

Her gaze determined and filled with purpose. A fire kindling behind her eyes.

LAANA: And in return, He bid me to do His will.

She turned her head, eyes lingering on Beric, then Taalien, before returning to meet Vaylan's.

LAANA: I must cleanse this place of corruption.

[music transition]

From a purely game mechanics perspective, Laana was never really in trouble - she still had 16 hit points remaining. But before the start of this episode I rolled for Laana to pray for the miracle of Cure Light Wounds to heal herself, and that roll was a Natural 1 - a critical success.

My house rule for prayer checks is that a Natural 1 results in a Great Blessing from the gods; a special reward if you like, for the Cleric's piety.

There are 6 possible blessings in this situation, details of which you can find at legendofthebones.blogspot.com. I rolled a 3, the result being that the Cleric is healed 1D6 hit points per level, or a permanent disfigurement, for example an amputated limb or blindness is reversed, as decided by the referee.

Now tempting as it was to heal Laana of the lightning scars which cover her body, it was much more prudent, and I think fitting that instead she would be healed 7d6 hit points; which took her back to full health.

All of this led me to make the scene more dramatic than it might otherwise have been, but I hope you can forgive my indulgence.

On a more practical note; after Laana was injured I feared the party would need to rest overnight, and thus lose valuable time; but with this intervention from the gods, they now won't need to.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again...it so often feels like the dice have a story they want to tell.

Now while I'm here behind the screen, this is a level up episode for Canute and Taalien. Starting with Canute, rolling a d8 for new hit points.....a 4

Canute's maximum hit points rise to 40

Let's see whether he gets any ability score increases.

Strength.....5
Intelligence.....1
Wisdom.....2
Dexterity.....4..
Constitution.....2...
And Charisma.....1.

Well that was a pretty disappointing level-up.

However, after much deliberation, I have decided to overhaul the Fighter Class. For some time, I've felt that Fighters get a raw deal compared with other classes.

Now the fighter class is an area of difference between original BX D&D, and Old School Essentials, which is my usual rules reference. OSE includes level 'to hit' bonus, whereas BX recommends additional attacks for higher level fighters. In addition, it is unclear in OSE whether the level 'to hit' bonuses apply to melee attacks only, or missile attacks as well.

I have always interpreted this bonus as only applying to melee attacks, which does tend to discourage fighters from being archers.

So, going forward in my game, Fighters will now get access to their level 'to hit' bonuses earlier and more incrementally. Secondly, from level 4, fighters will start to get an armour class bonus, reflecting their increasing ability to dodge, parry and block blows. It has never made sense to me that a 9th level fighter is just as easy to hit as a 1st level fighter.

The other major change is that from level 5, Fighters can choose 1 of 6 combat specialisms, one of which is Archer. I won't go into them all here, but the specialism for both Canute and Beric is Sword and Shield.

Both will receive the following combat benefits, but only when using this specific combination

Firstly, rolling a Natural 1 does not result in a critical failure

Secondly, an addition +1 bonus to hit is applied to attacks

and

Thirdly, a Shield Bash may be used in place of a normal attack, dealing 1D4 + Strength Bonus damage and with a 2-in-6 chance of knocking the target down causing them to lose their next action and move. However, this skill can be only used against humanoid targets which are of a similar size or less, and can only be used on enemies of equal or lower Hit Dice.

You can find a full class description, with all the combat specialisms at LegendoftheBones.blogspot.com

We will catch up with how Canute is getting on soon enough, but now let's level up Taalien.

Rolling a d6 for new hit points.....a 5. Taalien's maximum hit points increase to

Will he get any ability score increases? Let's find out....

Strength.....4

Intelligence.....6! Taalien's intelligence increases to 15, which will aid his spellcasting.

Wisdom.....2

Taalien's Dexterity cannot increase further.

Constitution.....3

And Charisma.....5

More importantly, Taalien also gets access to another 2nd level bard spell. There are 3 remaining possibilities, let's see what he has learnt.....a 1, that's Earworm

When cast, the Bard's music gets stuck in the minds of anyone who can hear within a 30 foot radius. Such is the annoyance of the sensation, that it is difficult to concentrate on any task that requires mental effort. Any intelligence based tests are made at a -2 penalty for 24 hours. The Bard must play for 3 Rounds to invoke the spell, and the Bard themselves are not affected. Anyone caught in the area of effect may make a Save vs Spell to resist.

OK then, I think that's enough of being behind the screen, time to get back to the narrative...

[music transition]

Chapter 61, Part 2, Day 61, Evening

Party Status

The party status is unchanged, except that Laana has received the miracle *Cure light Wounds*, and been restored to full health, and Taalien's hit points have increased to 32.

The companions stepped cautiously into the chamber, its heavy door hanging slightly ajar. Within, a long, shadowed hall stretched out before them, clearly designed for communal use. Closest to the mountainside wall stood a broad alcove housing a blackened hearth, cleverly constructed to vent smoke through a narrow shaft leading outside. The scent of old ash still lingered faintly in the air. A large wooden table, weathered by time and hard use, dominated this end of the room, flanked by benches now layered in dust. To one side, a cluster of barrels and moldering sacks slumped against the wall—supplies once meant to sustain life here, now rotting in silence. None of the companions had the stomach to investigate the contents too closely.

The far end of the chamber was far less mundane. Here, five lecterns stood in deliberate formation, positioned precisely at the five points of a pentacle etched into the stone floor—its lines carved deep, as though inscribed with purpose. Surrounding them, the walls were covered with shelves laden with decaying scrolls and manuscripts, many little more than crumbling shells.

Vaylan moved naturally toward this ruined library, drawn by curiosity and inquisitiveness, while the others approached the lecterns. As they drew near, they noted the chamber's only other exit: a narrow doorway leading back to the entrance hall.

Laana's gaze fell upon the arcane arrangement of the lecterns. A chill prickled her skin. She reached for her holy symbol, its familiar weight in her hand never ceased to comfort.

TAALIEN: You saw it, did you not?

Taalien had come to stand beside her, his eyes fixed—like hers—on the star-shaped formation.

The cleric understood his meaning. Yet something within her resisted an immediate reply.

LAANA: Saw what?

A small, wry smile played at the bard's lips.

TAALIEN: The Rift... or worse—what lies beyond it.

Laana offered only the faintest nod. Taalien turned at last to face her, and when she met his eyes, his expression was unreadable.

TAALIEN: Despair not,

He said softly.

TAALIEN: Some are born to dwell in the shadows, while most yearn for the light.

He paused, his gaze intensifying.

TAALIEN But a rare few... They *are* the light. And they shall drive out darkness—wherever they find it.

Before Laana could respond to the compliment, Vaylan rejoined them, his face caught between disappointment and excitement, as though standing at the edge of revelation.

VAYLAN: Little knowledge endures here,

He reported, voice tight with frustration.

VAYLAN: The parchments crumble at the barest touch.

BERIC: Found you nothing at all?

Beric asked, hope clinging to his words.

VAYLAN: Only this.

He raised a single scroll, its edges torn and darkened by time.

VAYLAN: It speaks of a ritual.

LAANA: A ritual? For what purpose?

Laana asked, her voice hushed.

VAYLAN: That I cannot yet say. The scroll is damaged.

His tone was careful, but carried weight.

BERIC: Then it's useless.

Beric turned away, waving a hand in dismissal.

VAYLAN: Not so, Beric,

The mage said, with quiet intensity.

VAYLAN: Though the purpose is obscured, the ritual itself is recorded in full. I may be able to discern its purpose with further consideration. But more than that, there are objects the ritual requires - and those, we have already seen

BERIC: What objects?

The warrior frowned. The talk of rituals was, for him, veering into uncomfortable territory.

There was a flicker in Vaylan's eyes—something between revelation and warning.

VAYLAN: The torcs. The wardens' torcs.

[music transition]

Off-mic, I rolled on my oracle to see whether there was of use to be found in this chamber, and the result was 'yes, but'

I then rolled on the Mythic Event Meaning chart for a prompt to help me determine what it was. That result was 'block liberty', which led me to think it was an artefact that could be used to seal or close something. That naturally led me to some kind of ritualistic magic.

Of course, with that 'but' on the oracle roll, I couldn't give the characters a free pass, so I decided that something about it needed to be incomplete.

In that regard, there are two things missing. Firstly, as we just heard, the purpose of the ritual is not completely clear, and secondly while four mummified Wardens all have one of the required Torcs, the fifth, belonging to the Hell-Taken warden is missing.

I am going to make an intelligence test for Vaylan, at a minus 2 penalty, to see whether he makes the connections regarding the torcs. The mage will need a 15 or less to succeed.....a 5.

Of course, if the companions wish to take the four torcs from the mummified wardens, then I wonder, would this cause them to rise in undeath? Time to ask the Oracle.....[1, no and]

Ok then.....

[music transition]

Chapter 61, Part 3, Day 61, Evening

Party Status

The party status is unchanged

Leaving the chamber behind, the companions moved cautiously across the hall, their footfalls reverberating against the ancient stone. With evening turning to night beyond the entrance, there was no longer any respite from the gloom as they returned to the dormitory - the resting place of the four mummified wardens.

Vaylan's mind churned. A section of the manuscript was missing - torn away, perhaps deliberately. He had lingered over the surviving runes, yet the ritual's purpose remained maddeningly elusive. Maybe with more time, its secrets might unfold. Then again, even if he could unlock its meaning, he may lack the craft to invoke it, should they have need.

The greater mystery was the torcs. Their presence in the manuscript suggested that the artefacts had been wrought by the wardens themselves. If that were true, then these long-dead men had more than guardians - They had been mages, and powerful ones at that.

But why were the torcs still about their throats in death?

There was no time to ponder further. They had reached the dormitory once again. The heavy air was unchanged; dry, stale and faintly metallic. The others looked at Vaylan with silent expectation.

The mage stepped inside first, his sense sharpening. At once, he felt it again - the subtle indescribable pull of arcane energy. The torcs shimmered faintly in the gloom, their silver bands surrounded by a soft blue haze.

BERIC: What now?

Beric's voice was low and wary. Kaleskleldha gleamed faintly in his hand. Vaylan did not answer immediately. His eyes swept the room, trying to make sense of the puzzle.

VAYLAN: In our homeland...

He began, gesturing towards Taalien as he spoke..

VAYLAN: Torcs are not merely ornamental - though they do signify wealth and status...They are also believed to shield the wearer; a ward against malign forces. That is why warriors wear them into battle.

BERIC: I've heard of those warriors

Beric interjected, a brow raised.

BERIC: Canute told me they fight naked.

VAYLAN: Some do, yes.

Vaylan allowed himself a brief, dry smile, but his tone quickly turned serious again.

VAYLAN: Earlier, I assumed the torcs were binding these men- containing them. Preventing their return as the restless dead

He paused, letting the silence stretch, so the others might follow his reasoning.

VAYLAN: But what if, they are not keeping something in...What if they are keeping something out?

LAANA: What do you mean, my love?

Laana stepped closer, her voice soft but steady. She saw it in his eyes then - the glimmer of discovery, the excitement of revelation in his eyes.

VAYLAN: The creature that attacked us...

His voice dropped, thick with the memory of Laana's injury.

What if that was once the fifth warden? It wore no torc, Perhaps it was lost, or removed. Without that protection, the corruption of this place might have taken hold - twisting him into the thing that we fought.

BERIC: How can you be sure?

Beric challenged, suspecting the mage was guessing.

VAYLAN: I cannot

He replied in a matter-of-fact tone. He turned towards the nearest corpse, but Laana caught his arm.

LAANA: Do not.

Her eyes were pleading, her fear for him plain.

He kissed her on the forehead, then drew back giving her a reassuring smile.

VAYLAN: There is only one way to know for certain - Trust me.

Inside the mage was far from confident.

Turning back, he reached down. The torc was cold to the touch, unnaturally so, the blue haze flared slightly as his fingers closed about the silver. A pulse met him, and for a moment, he thought he heard a whisper coming from the band.

Behind him, he could hear Laana softly intoning a prayer, perhaps in preparation should the dead begin to rise but more likely because she feared for him.

Vaylan's heart pounded with such intensity, he could hear it in his ears. His mind raced. If he was wrong, if his theory proved false, then the dead might rise, or he may never wake again - at least not as one of the living.

He took a breath.

Then, with quiet resolve, he lifted the torc free, and without hesitation, placed it around his own neck.

[music transition]

My earlier Oracle role asking whether the dead wardens would rise when the torcs were removed, was a conclusive 'no and'. I took that to mean that the torcs are protective artefacts, which gave me an explanation for how the fifth warden became corrupted.

With that in mind, the four torcs grant the wearer a permanent effect equivalent to the fourth level homebrew miracle, Soul Shield. This effect protects the wearer's soul from demonic and necromantic influences. As such, any Saves against attacks which result in level drain, possession, soul loss or stat loss are made with a +4 bonus

All that sounds good, but the fact the Wardens needed them in this place is worrying in the least.

[music transition]

Chapter 61, Part 4, Day 61, Evening

Party Status

The party status is unchanged

The companions emerged from the grim dormitory—its stale air lingering in their nostrils. The moonstone pale light illuminated their way, as they returned to the entrance hall and advanced to the hall's farthest extremity, where the pair of sturdy, iron-bound doors barred the way.

When Vaylan had placed the enchanted torc around his neck, a wave of clarity and vitality had surged through him, aligning his mind, body, and spirit with reassuring harmony. He spoke of the sensation to the others, and having experienced no ill-effects, he removed the other three from the remaining corpses, and gave them each one to wear themselves.

The doors in front them were crafted of thick, time-darkened wood. A massive iron bolt, clearly meant to seal them from this side, hung open in its cradle, suggesting that someone, or something had passed beyond and not returned

No sound could be heard from the other side, and so with nothing else for it, Beric stepped forward. His broad hands gripped the cold iron rings, and with a deep breath and a heave of strength, he pulled them open

As the moonstone's light spilled over the threshold, it illuminated a wide corridor perhaps 20 feet across. The ceiling rose just high enough for Beric's tall frame to pass beneath without stooping, while the walls were etched with time-worn reliefs.

The companions moved forward in single file, Beric leading the way. The big warrior proceeded with caution, remembering the trap the Canute had sprung in the Ulfhednar lair.

The carvings which lined the walls were disturbing. Twisted figures emerged from the stone—grotesque abominations that defied logic and nature. Some were impossible to fully comprehend: nightmare shapes beyond description; others were obscene fusions of man and beast—warped mockeries of life such as the Manticore they had fought at Karrek Uhgel, and which had claimed the life of Jenna.

All seemed to spill outward from a central portal carved midway along the corridor, some caught mid-emergence, as though crawling into the world from some hellish realm that had spawned them.

It was impossible not to be affected by the hideous depiction, though none of the companions spoke, each holding their own counsel. In their hearts, they all understood what awaited them deeper within the vault, and some things were better left unsaid.

The corridor ended at a stone door, surprisingly plain, and unadorned, except an imprint of a hand, finger splayed, carved into the centre of its surface. Around the doorframe, words were inscribed into the stone, in a manner the companions had seen several times before.

BERIC: Vaylan.

Beric called the mage forward.

Vaylan stepped up beside the warrior to examine the portal, sensing the arcane energy which radiated from its surface, cloaking it like a shroud. Silently, his eyes traced across the script, before being drawn to the hand-shaped depression - there were traces of dark, dried blood in the hollow. His eyes darted and his mind raced to decode the puzzle

[dice roll] = 3

Eventually, Vaylan drew his dagger, and brought it to rest upon the palm of his own hand

BERIC: What are you doing?

Beric asked sharply, reaching out to stay the mage's hand.

Vaylan looked at him, with impassive eyes.

VAYLAN: The words...

He said by way of explanation, nodding at the frame.

VAYLAN:
Beyond this stone, the tear grows wide
Where death and torment doth reside
Five chained souls to shadow's eye
Bound in life, lest all things die
No key may turn, to break this tomb
Save blood of one whose oath is doom

Beric furrowed his brow, clearly puzzled. Vaylan elaborated, his voice low and heavy with meaning.

VAYLAN I believe the Five chained souls are the keepers of the Hellstones. If I'm right, then the final line implies that only a keeper's blood can open this portal.

As he spoke, the air around him seemed to thicken, a weight settling on his shoulders as though the verse itself pressed upon him.

VAYLAN: Amos' spirit told me... though the Eye of Mordgren is not in my possession, it is bound to me—and I to it. For since his death, I have become its Keeper.

He glanced down at Beric's hand, still gripping his arm, before meeting the warrior's eyes again with solemn finality.

VAYLAN:
You must let me do this.

Beric hesitated, then slowly nodded. He released the mage's arm, the tension in his grip fading into reluctant acceptance.

Vaylan took a breath to steel himself, then quickly drew the blade across his hand.

VAYLAN: Argh

He grunted through clenched teeth as blood welled up from the wound. Without pause, he reached forward and pressed his bleeding hand into the depression.

The portal responded at once. A radiant white light flared around the edges of the stone, casting sharp shadows on the monstrous relief. A grinding sound echoed along the corridor, as the slab began to shift, stone scraping against stone, inch by inch, until the way stood open.

And beyond the portal lay a staircase, descending into the darkness below—like a path into the abyss.

[music transition]

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Finally, I would love to know what you think of the show, and I do respond to every message I receive, so with that in mind...

You can contact me on X @LegendBones, Bluesky @legendbones, Mastodon @legendbones@ttrpg-hangout.social, instagram at Legendofthebones, email at legendofthebones@gmail.com or got to Legendofthebones.blogspot.com for show notes, house rules, character profiles, art, maps and more.

Join me next time to find out what awaits our adventurers, as the Bones decide their fate..

None shall escape the destiny of bone.