



The Falcon, the Eagle  
and the Queen

# The Falcon, the Eagle and the Queen

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# Map



## More places

The Land of the Nibelungs  
(probably today's Norway)

Isenstein  
(Castle of Brynhild on Iceland)

Poland

Vienna  
(Wedding of Kriemhild and Attila)

Gran  
(Castle of Attila)

Pöchlarn  
(Castle of Ruediger of Bechelaren)

Austria

Xanten  
(Home of Siegfried)

Grasellenbach  
(Death of Siegfried)

Pförring  
(Rivermaids)

Lochheim  
(Gold of the Nibelungs believed to be hidden here)

Vormatia  
(Court of the Burgundians)

Odenwald

Burgundy

Bavaria

East Francia

Thuringia

Lake Balaton

Lake Constance

Saale

Main

Vltav

Elbe

Elbe

Danube

Danube

Rhine

Inn

Budapest

Stuttgart

Karlsruhe

Heidelberg

Nuremberg

Frankfurt

Wiesbaden

Koblenz

Augsburg

Regensburg

Passau

Linz

Munich

Prague

## Prologue

The falcon disappeared for a moment, and Kriemhild thought he had vanished. But there it was again, flying in large circles against the vast blue sky. Its powerful wings carried the bird high up into the air, and then it spiraled downward slowly, almost lazily, its eyes turned toward Kriemhild. They examined each other. The falcon was close enough for Kriemhild to see the brown, spotted feathers and taupe head coloring of the kestrel falcon. Just as Kriemhild leaned forward to get a better view, another bird of prey appeared in the corner of her eye, rapidly approaching the falcon.

It was a black mountain eagle, larger than the falcon. The falcon had seen it, too, and stopped its leisurely flight. It tried to gain height with quick strokes of its wings, but the eagle was already too close by and began to attack the falcon.

“No!” Kriemhild whispered and covered her mouth with her right hand, the left clawing into the window sill. The falcon still tried to escape upward, but he crossed wings with the eagle, disrupting his pace and sending him down ward in an uncontrolled tumble. The falcon now was below the eagle, which sent out shrill screams of war at the brown bird, before darting down in a steep drop for the kill. More screams echoed against the wall of the castle and hurt Kriemhild’s ears as she watched the eagle ripping out the falcon’s feathers and biting its flesh.

Suddenly, the eagle let go and flew away, while the lifeless body of the falcon fell down and hit the cobblestone below head first.



## At the court of Burgundy

“It all seemed so real, not at all like a dream,” Kriemhilds mother Ute said when her mother combed her black hair the next morning.

“And you are sure that they did not just fight over prey?”

“The falcon did not hold anything in his claws, and the eagle attacked it without reason.”

Ute nodded quietly, pondering over her daughter’s dream. She would ask her dream reader, a habit not approved much by her husband. But this morning, Kriemhild had cried in her bed, and Ute was worried that a simple bad dream would move her daughter this much. There had to be more to this.

Only a short time later, they sat in the small chamber of the court lady, who secretly served those seeking advice as a dream reader and fortune teller. This young lady named Dorethin had a connection to the world of the dead ever since she was a child. With a little luck, the spirits would provide her with answers for questions that she asked them now and then. A few candles on the table flickered, and Dorethin sat on a chair with her eyes closed, strands of thin hair stuck to her round face that glistened with sweat. Slowly, she moved her upper body back and forth, listening to the voices that Ute and Kriemhild could not hear.

“A tragedy,” Dorethin whispered. “The falcon is your husband, Kriemhild. He will be murdered. Injustice! Treason! Death everywhere. They are screaming, I can’t -” her eyes sprang open and she gasped for air. As Ute and Kriemhild watched her in disbelief over her speech, Dorethin quickly opened all the shutters and then the windows, as if to chase away the dark spirits that had spoken to her just moments ago. After she had wiped her face with a rag and took a generous sip of wine from her cup, she turned back to Ute and her daughter.

“Forgive me,” Dorethin said, still visibly shaken. “You know that my predictions not always come true. Some spirits are full of mischief, and like to cause trouble.”

“There’s only one solution,” Kriemhild said as she walked through the hallways back to her rooms. “I will refuse to marry. Forever.”

“You don’t have to do that, child,” her mother said with a smile. “I don’t believe a word of what Dorethin said. Besides, you still have years to think about marriage. And when the time comes, your brothers will be there to protect you and your husband.”

Kriemhild looked at her mother a little less worried now, and they kept the events of that day a secret between themselves.

## In Xanten at the Lower Rhine

“Wolfhart is coming with me, so please don’t try and hold us back. You’ll see, I’ll earn my crown, not just inherit it,” Siegfried said, both hands on his hips and a determined look on his face.

“I liked the version where you tell them about killing a dragon better,” Wolfhart said and leaned back into the grass.

“I can’t do that to my mother. Anyway, the dragon was your idea,” Siegfried said and also sat back down on the grass, far away from the castle, where the two friends made bold plans for their future.

“You’ll see, we will find a dragon. Your father is going to be so proud. I’ve got it all laid out, here, look at this,” Wolfhart said and rolled onto his stomach, then producing a roll of parchment from his small bag.

“I borrowed the map from Theophilus, and Endres marked it to the best of his knowledge. See, the red areas are where he says dragons and lindworms live.”

But Siegfried just laughed. “For as long as I remember, Endres has never left the castle. And come to think of it, I’ve never seen him sober, either. That’s who you put your trust in? And anyhow, you stole that map, right?”

“It’s all we have on dragons, my friend,” Wolfhart said. “And I think killing a dragon is just part of being a real hero. And of being popular with the highborn ladies.”

“*Highborn ladies*. That coming from you, Wolfhart, is —”

“Is what?”

Siegfried rolled his eyes and did not answer. The two young men looked as if they were brothers. Twins, even. Both were tall and had thick, auburn hair. Both were fair of skin but only Siegfried’s face had plenty of freckles dancing across it.

“When we come back, you’ll have earned your sword,” Siegfried said. “But think well. We will be gone for a long time.”



## I. Siegfried and Wolfhart

On the day of the accolade, Siegfried received both sword and shield from King Sigmund, his father, along with other worthy young men. Guests had come from all across the country. During the day, the sounds of jousting matches filled the air, while at night, music was played and everyone danced until even the strongest knight could not stand on his feet anymore.

Only Siegfried and Wolfhart were not tired. Wolfhart had been busy packing a few items and saddled the horses. Even the two horses looked alike - black as the night and quick as the wind. They waited impatiently, pawing the ground with their hooves, and Wolfhart had to do his best to calm them down. But they had to wait just a little longer, because Siegfried had to go and talk to the king and the queen. The morning dawned and the horizon was lit with a hint of orange, but the castle was still quiet after a long night of feasting. The guards stood in the hallways half asleep and only opened their eyes when Siegfried was already long gone.

He ran up the final flight of stairs, taking two steps at a time, then stood in front of the bed of his parents, trying to catch his breath. Both his father, King Sigmund, and his mother, Queen Sieglinde sat up surprised, the guards pouring in behind their son.

Siegfried knelt down at the bedside before his father.

“I’ve come to say goodbye.”

“My only child!” the Queen exclaimed with disbelief, but the king placed his hand on her arm.

“As I told you. He will be gone as soon as he receives sword and shield.”

“But not in the first night!” the Queen said with teary eyes and began to climb out of bed.

Siegfried raised his hand, stood up and took a few steps backward.

“I will ride now, Wolfhart is waiting at the stables. When we come back, I’ll be worthy of the crown, and he of the sword.” The Queen barely could hold her son for a few more seconds before he hurried back down the stairs. Moments later he galloped through the gate with Wolfhart, both of them laughing and hollering, chests filled with freedom and thirsty for adventure. Siegfried wore his sword at his belt, and Wolfhart, though actually not allowed one, was wearing a sword, that he had gone great lengths for, “borrowed” from the armory, .

Northbound they rode, then along the shore until the borderline of today’s Denmark. They encountered brigands, robbers and all sorts of strange folk, but whoever meant them harm soon came to regret it. The two young men put their years of training with the sword to good use.

Those were the first heroic deeds of Siegfried, and he never missed a chance to make his name known wherever he went. This was what being a knight was about! They traveled from court to court, where Siegfried was well received as a brave young prince, winning at tournaments and jousting matches. Such was their life, until one day they reached the foot of a mountain, attracted by the sounds of shouting and arguments.

They found Schilbung and Nibelung, the two sons of the recently deceased King Nibelung, and they argued over the inheritance. Siegfried had heard plenty about those two when they had traveled through villages close by. He recognized them immediately by their bright red beards and unusual armor made from silver. Schilbung and Nibelung had brought out the gold of the Nibelungs from the inside of the mountain, and now argued about how it should be split. When they saw Siegfried, they called out to him.

“You, young lad! You seem to be a proper knight, and we’d like to hear your advice. This here is our inheritance, tell us how to split it evenly between the two of us.”

Siegfried jumped off his horse and looked over the riches. A river of red gold and jewels poured out of the hollow mountain and surrounded it, more than one could ever count. Schilbung and Nibelung both watched him impatiently. The mountain giants who had gathered around the gold and who were men of Schilbung and his brother began stomping the ground, waiting to hear a decision.

“So?” Schilbung asked with his sword drawn. “We need to make a decision. Now.”

Siegfried looked at him unimpressed. “First tell me, how will I benefit from this difficult task?”

“You can take whatever you want of our gold. As much as your horse can carry.” But Siegfried had already spotted his reward. It was a sword amidst the jewels and gold, a sword so simple looking that it seemed suspicious.

“The sword over there, next to the chest of rubies. That’s what I want,” he said, pointing at the weapon.

“That old thing?” Nibelung said, standing next to his brother. “Why not the rubies, and you will never have to worry for the rest of your life.”

“That would be too generous. I am a simple man with simple needs,” Siegfried said most innocently. “The old sword seems a fair deal. My friend has lost his and I want to give him this one instead.”

The brothers stepped back and quietly talked to each other. Siegfried met Wolfharts eyes and winked. The old sword was in fact not just a regular weapon. It had belonged to King Nibelung. Balmung, so its name, made whoever carried it as good as invincible.

“We will give it to him and take it away again, later,” Schilbung whispered to his brother. “He does not know the power of this sword, and we outnumber those two boys.” Agreeing on this, the two turned back to Siegfried.

“You shall have the sword. Now advise us on the gold.”

“First, let me have the sword. It no longer belongs to your inheritance, so I would like to hold it.”

Sullenly, he was given the weapon, and Siegfried began pacing back and forth, holding Balmung in his hand. Again, the giants began to stomp impatiently.

“I’ve got it!” Siegfried finally exclaimed. “One gets the gold, the other gets the jewels.”

The brothers stared at him in disbelief.

“Are you mocking us?” Schilbung said, drew his sword and darted toward Siegfried. The young man received him with the self confidence of someone who has never lost a fight. And now, with Balmung in his hand, he was even stronger. With his first strike, he cut off Schilbung’s head, and Nibelung screamed with anger.

“What are you complaining about? Now you don’t have to share these riches,” Siegfried said. He was about to laugh at the angry man, when Nibelung drew his sword, jumped over to Wolfhart and rammed it through the boy’s chest as far as it would go. Then he withdrew it quickly and let the dying body sink to the ground.

“And your friend here won’t be needing a sword anymore, so give it back,” Nibelung said with a shaky voice. Siegfried should have jumped at the murderer of his friend, but he could not move a muscle. Never, ever had he considered that one of them would die, or even just get injured. How reckless he had been, thinking that he could just trick those two brothers. And Wolfhart had been the one to pay the price. Tears clouded his view and a feeling of absolute helplessness came over him. It was now Nibelung who laughed loudly. He had not expected that Siegfried would be hurt this much by his companion’s death.

“What, are you crying over a dead squire now?” he asked and kicked the dead body in the head so hard that it made a nasty crunching sound. Then he wiped his sword on Wolfhart’s clothes.

Slowly, the feeling of helplessness within Siegfried was replaced by raging, red anger.

“You will never get this sword back for as long as I live.” he said

“Well that won’t be long, now,” Nibelung replied and the two began a fierce battle, that began to make the giants nervous. The smell of blood coming from the two dead bodies had them lusting for violence. His anger gave Siegfried twice the usual power, and soon he had cut his enemy’s shield to pieces and cornered him against a wall.

“Let me live,” Nibelung suddenly pleaded. “I will give you the gold, all of it!”

But it was too late.

When the giants saw both their masters dead, they began shouting and stomping and attacking Siegfried. Others began to eat the bodies of the dead. Siegfried had to fight off those who wanted to devour Wolfhart, while the bodies of Schilbung and Nibelung were peeled out of their armor like shrimps and disappeared in the mouths of the hungry giants. It was desperate courage and God’s grace that made Siegfried kill every last one of them. Shaking and panting he knelt next to the body of his friend and put his hand on the face that was still warm, yet without expression. He sighed and was about to let his tears run free, when a mighty blow nearly split his helmet in two. He jumped up and turned around, but nobody was there. Again he was hit hard, and blood gushed from underneath his chain mail.

“Show yourself!” he shouted, but nobody answered. He began to wield the sword around his body and watched the ground. There! The foot of his invisible attacker stepped on a golden coin and

pushed it deeper into the bloody mud. Siegfried struck his sword down and found resistance. He struck again and heard a body fall to the ground, then a dark voice began to beg for mercy.

“Show yourself, or I will kill you with this next blow,” Siegfried commanded. Suddenly, a dwarf appeared before him, short but strong, wearing golden armor that was encrusted with jewels of all shades, his sword next to him.

“Who are you, and how is this possible?” Siegfried asked, full of surprise.

“My name is Alberich, an I guard the gold of the Nibelungs. It was my duty to protect it. I serve the legacy of the Nibelungs, invisible with this magic cloak I wear. But now that you have defeated the two heirs and me, you are the new king, ruler of the Nibelungs and owner of their gold. That is the tradition of the Nibelungs.”

“King, me?” Siegfried asked.

“Yes, and leader of the Nibelung warriors. They will be pleased to be rid of the two brothers,” Alberich said and, without further ado, handed Siegfried a plain, yet well made crown. Siegfried stared at it for some moments, then looked over at Wolfhart, who had given his life for it.

“Now that the gold is yours, what would you like to do with it?” Alberich asked.

Siegfried remained speechless, then shook his head.

“Nothing,” he began finally with a thin voice. “I do not want any of this. Bring the gold back into the mountain, or do with it as you please. Tell the Nibelungs that they should pick another king. I’m not more than a stranger to them, anyway.”

Now Alberich got angry.

“First you slay my masters, and now you want to run from duty? At least tell me your name, so I can make it known everywhere who has rejected the crown and broken with the tradition!”

Siegfried looked down at the crown in his hands.

“Siegfried of Xanten at the Lower Rhine. With his loyal friend Wolfhart,” he quietly spoke the words that he had repeated so many times over the past months. But then they had been underlined with laughter, or with a hand raised in victory.

Alberich had his dwarves bring the treasure back into the mountain, while Siegfried buried Wolfhart and sat next to the grave until nightfall. Suddenly, someone tapped him lightly on the shoulder. He looked up and expected the dwarf again, but it was Wolfhart who stood in front of him. He looked very pale and began to speak barely audible, with a voice that sounded as if it came from far away.

“The map with the dragons is still in my bag. And think about the crown the dwarf gave you. I think it would look good on you,” Wolfhart exhaled and disappeared into the darkness. Again, Siegfried sat up. He had dreamed. Or had he? It had been so very different. His heart began to beat wildly as he made his decision. Siegfried flung Wolfhart’s bag over his shoulder, put the crown on his head, Balmung on his belt and sat on his horse.



“Alberich,” he called into the darkness. “Tell the Nibelungs their king has to do just one more thing before he visits the castle. Keep an eye on my gold!”

“At your command, my king,” he heard the dwarf’s voice without seeing him. Then he galloped off into the night. Farther and farther away he traveled, following the map of his friend to places that had hardly ever been visited by any knight. And if some had come, they had lost their lives, as those lands were full of treacherous creatures and things that humans could not understand. And that was just what Siegfried encountered, as he rode through a dark forest at sundown one day.

It was eerily quiet, not a single bird was singing. And it had been weeks since Siegfried had last seen a human. He had planned on hunting for something to eat, but not even mosquitoes seemed to come into this part of the forest, that was so dense that even at daytime it had been hard to see. The ground was uneven, and tree trunks were scattered all over as if they had been ripped out by giants. Suddenly, the ground began to shake, and trenches opened around Siegfried, something was moving inside the earth. The horse shied and almost threw Siegfried off its back. Siegfried jumped off and let it run away, then he waited, a firm grip on sword and shield.

The earth before him opened, and an enormous lindworm appeared, winding itself across the trees and ripping them out as if they were mere twigs. It was covered in green scales, each of which ended in a poisonous thorn. Short, thick legs helped the worm to move swiftly, and his claws opened and closed. A pungent stench of decay came from the animal and took Siegfried’s breath away.

“Cursed Endres, he was right after all!” Siegfried thought while taking in the monstrosity before him, half in awe and half in disgust.

“What are you doing in my forest, you worthless human?” the lindworm hissed, reaching with his tongue for Siegfried. But Siegfried showed no fear. Before the animal could withdraw, he cut off the tip of its tongue with his sword. He wanted to kill the lindworm, for Wolfhart. The lindworm howled with pain and anger. Never before had anyone dared to hurt it. Its long body thrashed back and forth, each scale a lethal weapon. Siegfried leapt up a tree and jumped from branch to branch, the lindworm following him below, always snapping and biting the air. But its teeth never reached him, yes Siegfried managed to smash out some of them with his sword. As the creature winced from pain, Siegfried was able to put some distance between himself and the lindworm, and hid inside a dark linden tree. As the worm raised its head, trying to look for Siegfried, he threw his short sword and pierced the beast’s eye with it. Again, the worm began to thrash his body around, but finally disappeared into the ground.

Siegfried waited in the tree as it grew dark. He did not trust the lindworm. Here and there, he thought he saw steam coming out from the trenches. The lindworm was waiting for him.

At night, the strange forest was even more sinister. Several times he was startled by rustling sounds in the darkness, sounds that seemed like a whisper and then finally, he felt as if something was moving the branch that he sat on. After what felt like forever, the morning dawned and finally, Siegfried was able to see his surroundings again. He decided to face the fight before we would get more tired and

weakened that he already was. Carefully and as quiet as he could, he climbed down the tree. And the moment that his feet touched the ground, the lindworm broke through the earth and leapt at him with his jaws wide open.

But the young king was lucky once again. Instinctively, he pointed Balmung at his attacker and it cut through the lindworm's neck effortlessly. Blood gushed into Siegfried's face and he had to jump back so he would not be crushed by the collapsing monster. The ground shook under the final, uncontrolled spasms of the lindworm. Then the thrashing turned to shaking, then shivering, and finally a death rattle.

"You are my child, now that you have defeated me," the lindworm murmured. "Take my blood, bathe in it, and you will not regret it." Its eyes grew dim and another gush of dark blood poured out of its mouth. Siegfried hesitated, then took off his armor and began to rub the blood in to his skin. Wherever the blood touched, the skin grew thick and invulnerable. But just as he was about to lay down in the puddle of blood, a leaf of the linden tree fell down, attaching itself to his damp body, right in between his shoulder blades. Siegfried did not notice it.

His horse was long gone, and all he had were his weapons, his clothes and his crown. But the power of the dragon was roaring inside of him now, so he, Siegfried, son of the lindworm, traveled back to the world of the humans on foot. In the evening, he found a lake where he wanted to wash off the dried blood that had dried to a stinking crust on his body. As he reached back to scratch his back, he found the leaf of the linden tree, and underneath it a spot of still human skin. Desperately, he ran back into the forest, looking for the corpse of the lindworm, but it was to no avail. The earth had taken it back for good.