



REGIONAL DISPATCHES

Readying 592 CY

AHLISSA (ADRI/INNSPA)



As he knelt down in one of the prayer chambers, he felt at peace for the first time in weeks. It was a smallish room; sparsely furnished with a low, stone bench to kneel on and a small shrine in front of it bearing the Silver Lightning Bolt. The man now absorbed in prayer in front of this shrine was rather young, tall, strapping, and clad in armor; his dark, clear voice repeating the words of an old prayer of thanksgiving.

So much had happened this year that he found hard to understand. He still couldn't think of any reason why his brother could have sold the Hextorite's corpse to this agent behind his back. If Jaldor had only stayed long enough to explain himself, but didn't his hasty flight speak for itself? Magic... it must have been his trade that had alienated him from the faith. Lariot remembered all too well this letter that had reached the temple shortly after the Adri battle, signed and sealed by princess Karasin, thanking the church for returning the murderer's body to the court. She must have had contacted, if not employed, this strange agent who pretended to be one of the rangers—but why?

The battle itself had been won and Molil's forces had to withdraw—for that day at least. Up to that day the Prince had not attempted to subjugate the inhabitants of the Adri again; but still, mercenaries separated from that army were roaming the woods. Only days earlier, on the way back to Innspa, Lariot's travelling party had been able to rid the forest of a camp of robbers and thieves. Most of the criminals had fallen in honest battle, while one had been arrested and brought to Alforsford for trial. It had been a hard fight and for the second time within a couple of days Lariot had been on the brink of death—but again he had been spared. Lariot had been sure his soul was on its way to join His army when a companion's potion had healed him and hauled his soul back into his body. Never before had he been that close to death, although he had faced it a number of times. Only days earlier, he had nearly been killed while magically held by an undead priest of Nerull. That night a strange, shadowy snake appearing out of thin air had saved

him. Nobody could tell him what it was. Caverot, the temple's learned librarian, had mentioned something about some sort of ancient snake cult but he did not know much about it. (At least the snake had not felt evil.) Strange enough, Mara, a capable warrior and the one Lariot owed his life to, bore a strange serpent tattooed to her forearm and was accompanied by a colourful small snake ever since that night. But of course Lariot might as well not have seen it before. Somehow this serpent cult seemed to be one more mystery left to solve. And there was so much more left unexplained.

Before the party reached the ruin of that very temple, they had heard of Sir Pellidon of Ralsand again. Twenty years before, the evil temple had been overcome and torn down by a mysterious party led by him. Some of Lariot's companions had recognised the knight's name and recalled that they had met him only weeks before. He was a tall man in shiny armor, a skilful warrior up to this date, whose armor showed both the emblem of the Knight Protectors and the holy symbol of Heironeous, the silver lightning bolt. All too well had they remembered his words that the Knights were once again united and about to take up their quest to re-establish the Great Kingdom. Although Sir Pellidon himself seemed to be a man of valour (and as Lariot learned from the church's chronicles, he had been a paladin of the Invincible once), Lariot deeply doubted the merit of a knighthood that ranked both Heironeans and those serving the Herold of Hell. Therefore, the young paladin had not been surprised to read about Kargoth's treachery, recognising the corrupting influence of the Foul Scourge of Battle.

Pellidon had seemed to be very interested in the man who pretended to be one of the actors from *The Aerdy Re-Enactment Company* and who was almost killed by some Suloise assassins. Although the assassination could be thwarted, the nature of the man remained a riddle as he vanished into thin air taking all his belongings with him, except a small iron sceptre that was found in his tent and which could be identified as a replica of the ruling sceptre of the Prelacy of Almor. But who he really was and what he had come to Innspa for, could only be guessed even if this sceptre might be a clue to it.

Innsa had become part of Ahlissa months before, much to Lariot's regret. Why Karasin had consented to this was far beyond the young paladin who had always thought of politics as being too crooked and scheming. Some time ago one of the city's high officials had been revealed to be a spy for the North Kingdom. That he was taken to court, found guilty of high treason and executed, restored Lariot's faith in the city's legal system somewhat. Unfortunately, what information he had passed on to his masters could not be discerned. How it had been possible for him to achieve that position and yet remain unrecognised was a disturbing thought. There was much left to be done to render Innsa back into its former integrity and to restore the people's belief in the true faith.

After finishing his prayer, Lariot adhered in his kneeling position for some minutes, then stood up, bowed and left the chamber for the courtyard and his training that was about to begin.

BISSEL



In Sunsebb, at the Grand Festival of Bissel, the largest social event of the year in the March, a shocking announcement was made: "Per order of His Lofty Grace, Larringan, the Margrave of Bissel, I, Lieutenant Matin Danel, am instructed to inform you that as of the first day of

Fireseek, Five Hundred Ninety Two Common Year, all residents of Bissel that are of age, able mind, and able body are required to spend twenty six weeks of each year in military service in the newly sanctioned Great Army of Bissel, the March's first national army, service to last for a minimum of five years. Failure to comply with this new order will be considered an act of treason against the Margrave and the March and will be punished accordingly."

Ironically, it was only a few hours later that a number of nearby villages were destroyed by a large force of hobgoblins under the banner of Evard the necromancer. A group of adventurers, some local and some from as far as Keoland and Geoff, bravely united and defeated the hobgoblins outside the village of Arvenshire. Rumor has it that the Margrave personally rewarded those citizens of Bissel who saved Arvenshire. Evard's activity in the region can no longer be considered a rumor. Evard's minions have been defeated by adventurers in at least two plots against the March this past year alone, not including the attack during the Grand Festival.

The Margrave's order has caused significant unrest throughout the March, as few individuals are happy about forced military service. Citizens of Baklunish descent, especially those living in the northwestern portion of Bissel, are particularly outraged. Rumors of conspiracy run rampant in this and other areas of the March. There have definitely been public displays of opposition to a national military with forced conscription in the northwest, and rumors abound of some more physical displays in the near future.

Baron Darius Besselar, the founder and sponsor of the Grand Festival, has decided to move the festival to Pellak this year and hold it earlier than normal. This year's theme will be a celebration of the diverse ethnic backgrounds that exist in Bissel in hopes of easing some of the ethnic tensions in Bissel that have been growing since the war with Ket. The baron has commissioned the construction of a monumental totem in three pieces, each one representing one of the primary ethnic groups in Bissel. The totem will be displayed in Pellak during the festival, left on display there for a year, and then moved, piece by piece, to a permanent display location in Calpius' Craft.

592 CY marks the 200th anniversary of the building of the temple of Heironeous in Pellak. To commemorate this event, the Margrave will participate in a grand parade around the capital, wearing his finest ceremonial garments and regalia. Those longing to get an up close look at the Margrave should be sure to attend the parade.

Suspicious that lands in Bissel have changed hands, during or since the war with Ket, without appropriate taxation being levied, Gilys Gildeferre, the Revenuer General of Bissel, has ordered all of his clerks to reexamine the official tax rolls for the past 250 years. Gilys hopes to increase the tax revenue into the Margrave's coffers now that cost of maintaining Bissel's national defenses are at an all time high.

DYVERS



EXTRA EXTRA!! Travelers alert! While our fine city is usually fairly safe for the common soul, Dyvers, the city of sails, had been plagued as of late by rampant, wanton, ruthless cutpurse activity. For the most part the villain or villains have seemingly chosen to target successful adventurers and other obvious high rollers but one can only guess when or if the constabulary will put an end to this. As usual when in the middle of an investigation the Constabulary is loath to tip their hand about current leads. However I have found that if I'm persistent I find that sometimes people leak out little tidbits. Fortunately I was lucky to find a couple of talkers. The inside word is that the Constabulary has been for the most part baffled because the robberies have followed no apparent pattern. However clues have been found and popular opinion has it that one incredibly industrious rogue with apparently the favor of Olidammara is with them. Personally I feel that this streak of filching must come to an end eventually—hopefully sooner than later.

As if the cutpurse activity didn't cause the citizens enough worry there have been several mysterious disappearances of the cities adventurer's guild members. At first this reporter thought it was odd that they would be overly surprised by the loss of members as after all while it is unfortunate to lose comrades at arms sometimes the dragon wins and death had ended the career of many an adventurer. I was soon to find out that the missing souls

were not on adventure but instead were supposedly on holiday here in Dyvers and thought to be reasonably safe and secure. It is our hope that the adventurers presumed missing merely got a hot lead and left immediately.

Compounding the city's woes is the continuing dangerous situation in the dock district after dark. Several local adventurers told this reporter that mysterious, silent, masked individuals that appeared to be intent on nothing short of their death accosted them. One of the attack survivors thought it to be unnerving that even when wounded the attackers never made a sound. The deadly attackers were incredibly swift and reminiscent of the Shadowind and Children of the Sun monastic orders. Both organizations vehemently deny any connection with the attack and have offered their assistance. Unfortunately there was no one to left to apprehend as upon defeat the masked attackers dissolved into thin air—very strange indeed. Coupled with the what was left of the scrap corpse that I "shudder" had the opportunity to see recently the dock district could be a very deadly place indeed if one isn't careful.

Sadly It goes without saying that in times like these I have made doubly sure that my modest quarters have sturdy locks and that I don't dare travel alone at night. Regrettably this isn't remotely the same city of renown that this humble reporter loved growing up in. Hopefully the Magister and the Gentry will in their wisdom take necessary the steps to intercede and quell the seemingly teeming danger. The only bright note is that thus far the menace hasn't appeared to hurt commerce but if the average citizen does not feel safe then the cities merchants will undoubtedly feel the effect.

To further compound the problem the word on the street has it that its unwise to stray too close to the city's sewer entrances as more than one of our proud city workers has come to harm. Vocal opposition to the Magister claims that this is due to the Gentry's and Marissa Hunter's mismanagement of the gelatinous cube population. Further feeding fuel to the situation is an apparent lack of concern by the Dewomer Crafter's guild when dumping dangerous substances in the sewer. An unnamed source said that usually the Sewerman's guild would take their work problems up with the guildmaster but the popular belief of the guild feels that the guildmaster is on the take. The last thing our fair city needs is a work stoppage by vital service employees but it appears that a strike is an inevitable thing.

Nor is the misfortune that has befallen us been confined to our fair city. Our famed axebeak ranch was beset by anhkag attacks, which has driven the price of axebeak meat and garments up. Fortunately this is a situation on the mend as heroes stepped in to the fray to help solve the problem. Apparently one of the ranch's saviors is a fan of my column and sent the head of one of the dreaded beasts mounted for my wall. While I appreciate the thought the thing will take a while to get used to. Still while I write about the Dyvers woes and look at my new wall ornament I feel the need to thank Yondalla for having the foresight to settle me in a city seems to have an abundant share of brave good souls such as the heroes that defended the ranch.

Sadly this reporter had planned on writing about her fabulous time on Makilon Island watching the Shadowind order unveil their beautiful Dyvers history book. My only regret is that I couldn't stay longer with the monks. If you get the chance you simply must see the monastery and definitely go and take a look at the history book when it goes on display. The Shadowind monks do excellent work.

I'd like to leave a positive note in closing. If I had to think of one thing that sums up the essence of the average person in Dyvers it is that they can pull together in a crisis. While we are seeing dangerous times and things look gloomy we will see better times I'm sure of it. So take care and the next time you read my column the sun may well be shining on better times in our fair city.

As always good fortune and good reading.

Erin Quickquill—Reporter

EKBIR



Dezbat or Beyond the Mist

The caliphate of Ekbir is divided in fifteen provinces, each of which is treated like a state within the state, with its own local powers, rights and beliefs. Among those is Dezbat, which stand at a few miles above Ekbir city. Land of fishermen, Dezbat

does not shine by the wealth of its inhabitants. But its specificities may well be worth your attention.

Geography

Dezbat is a peninsula, beginning from the northern part of the capital city to the mouth of the Hadash River. The province is mostly a land of marshes and moors, giving it an odd reputation from the gloomy aspect of the land, which is reinforced by a frequent foggy weather. Glendaloch moors that occupy the central part of the province is known as the place not to go for its poor weather conditions and ruined flora. Two woodlands create a relative contrast in the landscape: the wood of Shayalah in the eastern part of Glendaloch and the Latbuda Forest in the southern part of Dezbat, which is probably the richest area, where life is far easier. On the northern part of the province stand the Morkmogil, a long line of reefs sharpened by the waves of the furious Dramidj Ocean. It is famous as a terrible place for ships that usually end broken into peace against those huge teeth that rise above the floods. Hopefully, all coastal parts of Dezbat aren't as bad as the North. On both side of the peninsula, life gathers around villages and hamlets. The only city that could be named as such is Sharkavir, the city—within—the—moor in Old Baklunish. With more than a thousand inhabitants, Sharkavir is the economical and political capital of Dezbat, where lives the Nayib, the Province Lord.

Politics

The political situation in Dezbat is a bit complicated. Two kind of Nayib usually exist: those from royal blood for

which their title, lands and rights are transmitted through generation and those who gained their powers through their rank in the hierarchy of the Al'Akbarite church. House Ashir from Dezbat, use to be from the first group but is not anymore. In fact, all the royal family of Ashir disappeared in the terrible assault of their fortress by riders from the Ataphad islands during the year 577. In memory of Nerim the wise—last Nayib of Dezbat — and his line, the Caliph of Ekbir decided to give the power over Dezbat to a cousin branch of the Ashir House, which took the name of Ashir afterwards. Urik Ashir, the new Nayib is still the one ruling Dezbat today. Some people say that his political style is rough and that his people fear him more than they like him. Rumors say that martial law is may be used in Dezbat and that justice is swift and somehow unfair in Dezbat. In fact, Urik's halfbrother, Keyn, who is in charge of the armies, has done much to reinforce it and guarantee that crimes are not left unpunished. Whatever may be the truth, the Caliph remains confident and happy of his choice, mostly because the trustworthy Darman Niklad, ambassador of the province in Ekbir, knows how to balance benefits and drawbacks in the eyes of the Caliph.

History and Myths

Legends have always been a major aspect of life in Dezbat and bards usually appreciate it. Shadows of dragons have been seen flying over the moors, strange and unexplained lights have appeared on the Morskmogil coast provoking shipwrecks, and spectres of long dead sailors haunt the docks they once worked.

Some of the stories shared around the fire take their roots in the history of the province. It is the case of the Faris Rautha, the renegade order of knighthood that failed in protecting the Ashir Family during the sad event fifteen years ago. Those few men—who are chased by the local law — are said to benefits from extraordinary magical powers including the ability of transforming themselves. But the place in which the huge majority of the stories take place is usually the Glendaloch Moors. Inhabitants say that their land is cursed and that this curse, a fruit of the dark past, is responsible for the evil that happens around Glendaloch. Clerics have come and settled there to try and divine the disappearances, unnatural barking sounds, and ghost visions that occur at night. Renowned heroes have come but brought nothing more than a short respite. Evil priests and sorcerers have been uncovered and caught but the doubt still exists to know if they were responsible at some point for the events or attracted by the dark atmosphere of the area favourable to their activities.

Local Habits and Celebrations

People from Dezbat are great worshippers of Al'Akbar: no fish is taken from the Dramidj, no land is cropped without a prayer to the savior of the Bakluni, the holy prophet. As part of their devotion, they have instituted a few local habits that are considered as golden rules to follow. First of all is the right of asylum that is given to any people requesting it in all places where Al'Akbar is venerated. Whatever those persons have done in their terrestrial life—swindle, theft,

murder—they have the right to try to save their soul, turning it toward Al'Akbar. Even, militia or army does not have any other choice than to see the one they claim be treated as free men in places of worship. Of course, there is a limit to this right for the justice to be returned. After three days of rest and prayers, those who asked for asylum must leave and face their destiny.

The other habit that has to be noticed is the attitude toward death. On the Day of the Dead, a special occasion in Dezbat, all beloved and friends which has left this world are worshipped and treated as if they where still alive. Families spend hours above the tombstones, sharing their meals around the missing, talking to them in order to give them news from the world of the livings. Most Dezbat people believe that dead walk on the earth as invisible spirits and they profit of this special occasion to remember and celebrate them, to tell them things that couldn't have been said during their lives.

GEOFF



The New Year brings victory! Grand Duke Owen and his ragged Army of Liberation overwhelmed the giant's forces at the town of Preston, deep inside the Oytwood. The Gyric army besieged the giant's fortifications while small units of skilled warriors formed Wolfpacks to hold off a relief column that was marching to Preston to raise the siege.

The Army of Freedom brought no small part of this success from the Yeomanry, which was assigned to the command of Grand Duke Owen by King Kimbertos of Keoland. In addition, warriors from the Gran March and Keoland came in large numbers to help the fledgling Campaign of Liberation.

Many of the Keoish forces arrived to fight for the honor of Princess Calisse Skotti of Keoland. Just a few months ago, the royal house of Keoland announced the engagement of Calisse, the fourth and youngest daughter of King Kimbertos, to Grand Duke Owen. The wedding date has not been announced, but is expected in the near future.

The victory at Preston has opened the Javan River to shallow boat and barge traffic to the town of Hochoch. Fresh supplies are rushing north to feed the army and the civilian population. With the Javan River clear, Grand Duke Owen is sure be able to bring more supplies and materials to Geoff to continue the war against giants. Look for the campaign to resume in the spring.

GRAN MARCH



The chill of winter and the dawning of a new year bring Marchers inside to share tales of events near and distant. Today, the bard Eskevar Davatros is holding forth his tale of the last year's events in Gran March.

"It's been a long year here in Gran March. Not so long as in some other parts of the Flanaess, but long enough. Most of you have probably heard some of what I've to say this evening, but maybe not all of it. I beg your kind indulgence. Let me tell my tale, we can talk about details another time.

"The first news everybody seems to want is from Geoff. Well, I've got news on that, sure enough. It looks like the campaign is picking up momentum. The Army of Retribution and that Geoffite Army of Liberation turned back a giant horde at a place called Bloody Ridge. Then just recently the Geoffites retook a town called Preston down in the Oytwood. None of this has come cheap, though. More than 500 young men of the March are buried under foreign soil at Bloody Ridge.

"Things are looking up on that front all the same. One of the big Watchers, a fellow named Caticial Fangorn, was sent by our Commandant to solve some of the problems we've been having over there. Hear tell he's doing a fine job too, especially pushing the road through.

"That road is crucial to our troops at the front, and don't you think others don't know it too. We've had elves, goblins, and even a few traitorous humans trying to stop that construction and re-supply, but so far they haven't succeeded. Fort Endurance still stands, the road gets a bit closer to Hochoch every day, and supplies keep flowing in under the watchful eye of the 20th Battle.

"Speaking of supplies, things are looking tight all across the March. With so many young men in the field, there's talk that the Commandant's going to raise the taxes to help pay for it all. Doesn't help a lick that some of the orcs and whatnot keep getting in behind us. Raids into Barony Malthinius have really hurt commerce there, and replacements for horses lost in battle are starting to be in short supply. But the good news is that the elves just recently sent an ambassador to Hookhill, I hear they're going to work out a way to close the Dim Forest to raiders, or at least make them work harder for it.

"On one of those raids up in Malthinius, the buggers brought a giant with them, and they had the gall to kidnap one of the Electors, Timmor Ellthorn. Some of our troops brought him back, but it was a close thing. The Army's keeping it real hush—hush, but I'm led to believe that he was to be sacrificed to a dark power to put some terrible magic into the hands of our foes. Is that true? I can't say for sure, and I won't lie and pretend I'm certain, but it has a ring of truth to it if you want my opinion.

"Of course, we've been seeing humanoids in the Lortmills too, for the first time in memory. Yeah, they were driven out a century ago, but they're back. Best anybody can figure, they were sent up from the Pomarj. They sure

didn't just spring up out of the dirt and rocks. We've got enemies on all sides, it seems. Well, maybe not in Keoland, but you never know when they'll get imperial ambitions again. It's all the Commandant and Knights can do to keep fresh troops available for Bissel, Geoff, and Ulek, and still keep our borders secure.

"I'll tell you what else, and I'm not the only one to think so. These folks are awfully well organized for orcs and goblins and ogres. The ones that have been raiding us aren't the same tribes as are in Geoff, near as we know, but they've still got some sort of leadership, and it seems like they're acting at least partially in concert with the giants. The ones in the Lortmills it's harder to say if they're in cahoots with the ones in the Forest, but it's awfully coincidental that we've got so many fronts going bad at once.

"The lack of troops to police things here at home has been having its effects too. Maybe you've heard, maybe you haven't, but the churches are losing their flocks. Not all at once, of course, just a few here and a few there go off to join cults. Some of those aren't so bad. This cult of Pelor (he's a Flan sun god) isn't so bad, but if you ask me, it's still a destabilizing influence. But much worse are the folks who go off to join cults of the Whispered One, or Heironeous' less savory brother, or a cult of disease. Those are dangerous to everybody around them. If you don't want the heart of the country to rot out while our boys are fighting the good fight, you'll keep an eye out for any signs of these dangerous cults.

"I guess those are the major trends. We can talk about details, like the raids on Carern, or the attack on a supply caravan, or some of these cults that have been exposed and given the justice they deserve, if you like. I'm sure you've heard some of it, but have questions about some of the rest. I've been all over the March and heard a great deal, so maybe I can fill in the details.

"Oh, one other thing. Some of you have the look of fighting men and women about you. A friend of mine in Syrloch has asked that I pass the word—they've worked out a new training scenario, and anybody who's done some fighting and is likely to do more in Geoff or Ulek is invited to attend. They say you might learn a trick or two that will keep you alive and bring us victory next time out.

"Now then, before we get into details, let's raise a toast to our troops for their bravery and sacrifice. For Commandant and Country!"

Note: Garmageddon will be hosting a battle simulator interactive in Augusta, GA Feb 8—10. For more information see www.garmageddon.com.

GREYHAWK



Sarana, the high priestess of Pelor in Greyhawk, announced this week that the Temple of Pelor would be undergoing renovation in the upcoming year. Apparently the Temple has received a

large donation from an unnamed donor. When asked where the money for this work was coming from, Sarana responded cryptically, "The brightest Light may shine from the darkest places."

In the last few months several more Rhennee fortunetellers have been run out of town for using various unsavory techniques to steal money from visitors to the city. One of the most common is providing a special drugged "vision" for the unfortunate visitor. The patron then awakens in an alley without their money. All visitors to the free city are advised to watch their purses when these villains are around.

The final celebration party for the marriage of local merchant Auldon Brendingund was held last week. He and his lovely young bride Adra were married in Hardby a few months ago but the celebrations have been monthly since that time. Although the bride is rarely seen, the groom plays the fine host with a huge pavilion located on his estate. Can the patter of little feet be too far away? According to the manager of the Brendingund Merchant House, Bwirse, "I can guarantee the Brendingund name will continue far into the future of this fair city. We have not even tapped one fourth of the potential that we have here. You will be hearing from this family for a long time."

for the Mullah and mercilessly slain in the streets of Molvar.

When the armed men attempted to collect on the supposed reward for the Mullah's death, they received a most rude surprise. The ignorant foreigners seemed to expect to be rewarded for their vigilante justice; however, the lead Thresher denounced the men for their casual murder and the grins of self—congratulations died on their lips.

"First," he said, "this is not a Mullah, this is a peasant girl who merely looks like the woman in this poster. Second, you should be glad that this is not the woman you sought, for had you spilt her blood instead, your punishment would be more than doubled. Third this poster is from Bissel. Fourth, the man offering the reward did not identify himself. How did you expect to collect? Fifth, you are nothing but dangerous fools. Now you will come with us, and if your hand moves any closer to that hilt, we'll begin bleeding you right now..."

Reports indicate that the last words from the group before the hot brand that would marking them forevermore as mining slaves, was pressed to their shoulders was "But we're heroes, we slew the evil priest.... This is just a misunderstanding!"

KET



Rumors of the theft of the Blood of the True, a relic of the True Faith have been leaking from the City of Molvar for the past few weeks. The dark rumors also speak of unknown and well-armed men who were seen at the temple just prior to the discovery of its theft.

These dire events are most likely behind a new movement among the Mullahs to extend the weapon restrictions that guard the capital to Molvar, Polvar and Falwur to help guard against such future thefts. The call has struck a resonant chord among many merchants, particularly the Mouqollad Consortium, who have been suffering an increasing number of raids on their caravans in the Bramblewood Gap and along the Irafa road. The Threshers, which have been advocating this course of action since the rules were initially imposed on Lopolla, naturally are also eagerly support the idea.

However, even among the Mullahs, there is some opposition to the proposed regulations. A Prominent Mullah from the very temple where the relic was stolen has firmly taken a stand against what appears to be the majority opinion of his Faith. The Church of Hextor, though it seldom interferes in the politics of Ket, has been quick to loudly voice its support for this Mullah.

The recent attempted murder of a different Mullah from Molvar has only put more fire and brimstone into the preaching of the Mullahs. It seems that foreigner mercenaries have been offered a reward for her head. In a tragic turn of events a simple peasant woman was mistaken

NYROND



Dispatch #5

The winter wind slashed against Clarrian's cloak as he approached the Three Creeks Inn. The sight of the inn did not please the elder warrior. He had expected a quiet, somber location for this meeting; a place that old friends could reminisce about comrades long gone and faded glory, the reward for surviving a life of danger and peril. This place was in the throws of a party. "Orin had a hand in this I'll wager" he mumbled to the wind. The front door had a sign indicating that the Inn was under new management. The new owner, Matheio Sejanus, was having a grand re-opening party.

The Griffin's Talon was a respected group back in the days before the war. Now only three members survived to honor the dead. Clarrian Harbinson fought the humanoids in the Flinty Hills most of his life. He had become a well-respected fighter before age overcame his ability to wield his great sword. Orin Larksong always loved a crowd. To say he was the life of every party he attended would be an understatement. He spent most of his youth in search of adventure and gold. His years had given him the gift of lore that all the younger bards clamored for. The remaining member of the Talon was Ellorianna Golderian. Her mastery of the mystic arts had grown over the years as she sought arcane knowledge in both tomb and library. Most of her time now was spent in the Rel Mord halls of learning instructing the next generation of spell crafters.

Clarrian entered the noisy inn and cast about for his friends. Orin was easy to spot; he was on the small stage

singing a ballad with several members of the Oerth Theater Association accompanying him. Ellorianna was harder to spot. She had chosen a table from which she could see the front door, but the people entering would have a hard time spotting her. Clarrian fished out a noble and threw it at Orin's shoulder. It hit its mark. Clarrian signaled to Orin that he was going over to Ellorianna's table and he should join them.

After the song was over, Orin made his way over to the group. "Hail and well met friends! Isn't this a great party?" Orin bellowed, his smile a mile long.

"You can hardly hear yourself think in this place," snapped Clarrian. "By all the hairs in Moradin's beard, why would you want to meet here?"

Orin shrugged, "Well, when I chose the place, the owner had just died and I figured it would be quiet. This is so much better! I am surprised that the new owner could cover the back taxes. I hear he is of adventuring stock. It is good to see King Lynwerd make an effort to restore the adventuring life. Just wish he would quit taxing the soul out of people," he mused.

"Haven't you heard?" Ellorianna queried. "Since Almor was made an arch-duchy and the adventurer taxes were instituted, he has been able to eliminate some of the more repressive taxes. If Almor continues to recover and produce food for export, Nyrond's troubles might be coming to an end."

Clarrian snorted. "I doubt that." He looked over the crowd. "Look. There. See that half-orc. He is an adventurer. Letting those folk wander among us is a terrible mistake. Did you hear about that group that infiltrated the Royal Mail service? Had to kill the lot so I hear tell. And let's not forget about the corruption that has become almost commonplace."

"I heard something about a sheriff in the Gnat Marsh stealing taxes and hanging Orcs." Ellorianna said. "Sounds like your kind of guy, Clarrian."

Clarrian nodded. "Sounds like a good chap."

"Not really," she continued, "He was in league with Price Sewardt."

Orin looked at the mage questioningly. "I thought he was supposed to be in Korenfluss?"

Ellorianna turned to him eagerly. "What news have you heard?"

Orin shrugged and grinned. "I know nothing for certain and do not wish to spread mere gossip. As you know, rumors aplenty already abound."

Ellorianna sighed heavily, "Since when has that been a problem for you, O' teller of tales?" Orin just shrugged and gave a cheesy smile.

Clarrian declared, "Let's not forget about the problems in Almor and the Flinty Hills. Almor is still infested. The crown should encourage adventurers to sweep in there and clean out the evil rooted there. The Hills could also use a good flushing. I hear that entire villages of Gnomes are being slaughtered. That cannot be allowed to continue!"

Orin smiled, "Nothing a few adventurers and a good keg of ale can't fix. Ha!" He could tell Clarrian wanted to be out there, battling evil in whatever forms it took.

"Better the enemy you can see, eh Clarrian?" Orin quipped. "The tales I hear are of corrupt officials here in Rel Mord wreaking havoc. The freedom fighters in the Celadon also need to be watched. That situation was explosive before the King put the Baroness in charge and put a member of the Brotherhood of the Bronze among his advisors. That smoothed out a lot of feathers."

"Did they ever find out who killed Adrian, her son?" asked Ellorianna.

Orin replied, "Unfortunately they haven't discovered the culprit yet. The Baroness believes it was someone in the Celadon resistance, but they adamantly deny responsibility."

"What news of the King's fiancée?" asked Clarrian.

"Still under medical care last I heard." Orin claimed.

"Didn't she suffer heatstroke awhile back?" inquired Clarrian.

"Several years ago, in fact." Ellorianna clarified.

Clarrian scratched his head and mumbled, "Nobles sure are weird."

The conversation ceased as the waitress finally showed up to take their orders. The three continued to swap stories and rumors well into the night. None knew what the New Year would bring, but each couldn't wait to see how the future unfolded. They went their separate ways after a final toast. "To the fallen. Let their sacrifice not be in vain."

Dispatch #6

Food in the Shield Lands is once again going to be scarce during the winter months. Although additional farmland has been brought back into use this year, the harvest falls short of what is needed to comfortably feed the current population and maintain sufficient emergency stores. Thankfully, next year's harvest should come much closer to meeting the needs of the nation, as the lands around both Gensal and Torkeep are returned to farming. Until then food is still imported from friendly lands around the Nyr Dyv, but this continues to drain the nation's coffers and raise the prices of simple, everyday goods. This problem remains critical because a disruption of the food supply lines would greatly hinder the reclamation effort and be felt almost immediately due to insufficient surplus. Because of this, both Pathfinders and Shield Knights accompany each shipment, whether by sea or by land across Critwall Bridge.

The liberation of Torkeep and Gensal late in 591 CY has begun an exodus of people from Tent Town. Those leaving feel that the dubious comforts of the liberated lands are better than staying in the squalor of Tent Town. Additionally many of those leaving are originally from the newly liberated areas and wish to return home, regardless of the destruction. The relocation of so many to the newly recovered (and some say as yet completely secured) lands brings concerns of how to feed and protect these people through the winter months. In response, the Council of Lords has been forced to increase the number of supply caravans going north over the winter. There has been some grumbling among the Shield Knights that these longer supply lines are too vulnerable to raids from the occupied lands. Tent Town has noticeably shrunk due to people leaving for the north. Undoubtedly more will make the

journey in the spring, but many believe that Tent Town's population will remain very close to its current size as word of the liberation of Gensal and Torkeep spreads and more exiles return home.

The victory at Gensal has ignited a debate that has been simmering for years. It is believed that many of the noble families of the Shield Lands have been completely destroyed. The Council of Lords has been able to avoid the inevitable confrontations from this situation because none of the affected lands had been reclaimed. This changed with the liberation of Gensal. Currently, the Knights of the Holy Shielding control the area, but this is a temporary solution. The House Sharn (currently headed by Lord Natan Enerick) has already begun complaining that having the Knights there biases any selection toward a family that venerates the Archpaladin and have suggested that Lady Katarina may be maneuvering to claim these lands for herself. The many factions within the council have prevented any resolution to this problem and threaten to weaken the unity of the nation as various factions maneuver for advantage.

The liberation of Torkeep and Gensal has required the construction of border forts along the new frontier this winter. The old forts that are now within the reclaimed lands are being dismantled and their materials are being used for the new forts. One fort is already complete. Sir Arinson, commander the Northern Guard, has managed to complete Fort Vigilance. He used his personal funds to hire a large contingent of workers from Tent Town to begin dismantling the old Fort Vigilance when Torkeep was reclaimed. He also sent agents to buy horses and wagons from Furyondy to move the materials. These efforts enabled him to finish the fort before most of the others were completely disassembled. The horses and wagons Sir Arinson bought are now being used to help build the other forts. The speed of the reconstruction has allowed the Northern Guard to continue its patrols into the occupied lands.

The enigmatic group known as the Open Spirit has begun building a temple in Tent Town. This new structure should help their mission of helping those in need with more room to hold the sick and crippled. There was a great deal of resistance initially to the construction of this temple to an unknown god. A combination of the location and their record of benevolent service eventually convinced Earl Bohdon to grant them permission. The Open Spirit explained that this is to be the first of a new series of temples in each of the cities of the reclaimed lands.

The long—standing blockade of Admundfort has ended in failure. The ships from both the Shield Lands and the Kingdom of Furyondy were attacked and destroyed by a mass of creatures rising out of the Nyr Dyv. This was apparently a side effect of an internal conflict within the forces of Iuz. The wizard Wayne, ruler of the occupied lands, was attacked by one of his subordinates. The victor of the conflict is unknown, but the destruction of the blockade has opened the way for reinforcements and supplies to be brought to Admundfort. Ships still patrol the area attempting to limit access to the island, but not nearly as effectively as during the height of the blockade. Rumors

persist of Rhennee smugglers making it past the patrols with relative ease. The retaking of the original capital of the Shield Lands has greatly been pushed back by the destruction of the blockade. The expensive loss of the ships has further strained relations with the Kingdom of Furyondy.

The forces of Iuz have greatly increased their activity in the occupied lands recently. Patrols along the new border are encountering enemy forces of much larger size and frequency and the number of Pathfinder patrols lost in the occupied lands has been increasing of late. The increased activity is believed to be a side effect of Iuz's forces trying to reestablish control after the internal struggle between Wayne and an unnamed subordinate. However, there are persistent rumors of groups formed with the express purpose of hunting down and destroying Pathfinder patrols. It is believed that these so—called "hunter-killer" groups are elite members of the forces of Iuz. The commander of these groups is currently unknown.

THEOCRACY OF THE PALE



After a thorough investigation by the Church Militant, the Theocracy of the Pale has created a new Dawn Camp near the Troll Fens. (For those who do not know the comfort of the Blinding Light, a Dawn Camp is a re-education camp for heretics and others who are deemed

Pholtus.) The new camp totally encloses what used to be the town of Tristor. Acting on the reports of adventurers, the Church Militant conducted a full-scale investigation of events that took place there recently and hangings that occurred twenty years ago. The findings resulted in several charges of murder, lynchings, and various other crimes. Several inhabitants of Tristor were sent to a high security Dawn Camp for permanent imprisonment while many other residents are expected to go through the re-education process.

RATIK



Five years have passed since the failed invasion of the Bone March claimed the life of the late Archbaron Alain IV. The responsibility for ruling Ratic has fallen upon Lady Evaleigh. But to most it seems she is either unwilling or unable to lead the people of Ratic. She has been sequestered in her estate for many months, making no public appearances, refusing to see visitors, and leaving the country to run itself.

In early winter of 591 CY, as a small army of orcs and gnolls invaded from the Loftwood, clashing with the militia of House Bredivan, she has done nothing. As border

skirmishes erupted in the Timberway with our own allies—the Frost Barbarians—she has done nothing. As the merchant guilds openly announce their plans to seize power from the nobles and restrict the power of the throne, she has done nothing.

And now, in a strange twist of fate, a beggar has appeared in the streets of Marner, claiming that he is the squire of Alain, and that Alain is still alive in Spinecastle. At first, few people listened to the madman's rants. But he continues to spread the same tale to all who will listen. Rumor has it that Irwinn's Blackshields, an order of outlaw knights loyal to Alain, have learned of the squire and are searching for him. Certain guild leaders also have offered some gold crowns to find the man. But still, the throne of the archbarony and the household of Evaleigh have remained silent.

SHIELD LANDS



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TUSMIT



Strange Towers Appear Over Night

Several weeks ago two mysterious towers appeared overnight outside the walls of Sefmur within bowshot. Startled officials mobilized the military to investigate.

After realizing that there was no immediate danger the Pasha ordered the Farises to stand guard and prevent anyone from approaching the towers. Both towers dwarf the tallest buildings in Sefmur and it is said that the towers are covered with the names of Bakluni and Suel people who died in the Twin Cataclysms. Unnamed sources claim that there are no known methods of accessing the interior of these puzzling edifices. Further mystifying officials is the rumour that similar pairs of towers are appearing in other Baklunish and Suloise metropolises.

Terror in the Yatils

Stories are filtering in from mining communities in the lower Yatils in Dihn that livestock are disappearing as well as several local children. Despite exhausting efforts, no trace of the animals or children can be found....

Harvest Time

Harvest is nearing and the Galda farmers of the Udgru forest in the sheikdom of Dihn are preparing to harvest their crops and ship them down the Blashikmund River. Mercenaries are always in demand at this time of this season. How hard can it be to guard a river caravan with the Water Watchers around?

ULEK, PRINCIPALITY OF



Gossip of strange creatures that reside off the coast of the Principality of Ulek have been recounted in several taverns within Gyrax, the capital city of the Principality of Ulek. While many folks believe the hearsay to be nothing but farfetched sea tales, some intensely insist that the tales are true. Regardless, the Principality of Ulek Navy is on the lookout for any possible interference or trouble from these strange creatures that lurk below the waters.

Whispers about traitors being found in nearly every town and city still exists. Does the value of a few coins really have that much power to sway men to turn their backs on their fellow countrymen? Or are the whispers merely to keep folks on their guard from whatever the Pomarj might try next? Or could it be something far worse than anyone is expecting? Might it be the return of Jolomislag?

While such gossip and whispers continue, the fact that bandit activity is on an increase cannot be disputed by anyone. Ironhelm, located in the northern portion of the country has been the hardest hit, but other regions have also seen attacks by thugs and the like. The cause for such actions can be directly linked to the hard life many folks are now experiencing due to the humanoid occupation of the Disputed Territory to the east of the Lortmil Hills.

Additionally, the increase of humanoid patrols in the Disputed Territory has been on a tremendous rise. A wide variety of humanoids have been seen from kobolds, to orcs plus several ogres. A band of hobgoblins have been reported in the woods to the east of the city of Thunderstrike. Meanwhile, an orc war party has been on the move. And this is just the beginning of what has been seen as creatures nearly as large as a giant have been seen and even caused havoc upon several villages in the Lortmil Hills.

It is believe these humanoids are under the control of one of the warlords in the Disputed Territory. The first sighting of this warlord has been reported. This particular warlord, described as a massive greenish creature of immense strength, has been blamed for the mutilation of several dwarven members of the Principality of Ulek Army.

Due to this fact, Prince Olinstaad Corond gathered his finest troops and with aid of the best halfling scouts promptly located the warlord. But what Olinstaad was not aware of, or perhaps he didn't care, was that the warlord wanted for the prince to find him so a battle could ensue and perhaps Olinstaad could be brought to his knees. To the horror of every citizen of the Principality of Ulek, the warlord's plan nearly worked to perfection as Prince Olinstaad Corond was struck down in battle but quickly carried off by his men. The current status of Olinstaad is unknown and no one has reported seeing him since the battle. Could it be that a new leader will rule over these lands? Or is Olinstaad merely recovering from the wounds of battle before returning to the throne? Whatever the case may be, the status of Prince Olinstaad Corond is one of the

foremost concerns of nearly every citizen of the Principality of Ulek. Without Olinstaad what can the Principality of Ulek look forward to next?

URNST, DUCHY OF



The Duchy of Urnst was rocked with the unexpected death of the Lord Seoman Verle, one of the newest members of the Honorable Chamber. Verle died under dubious circumstances involving a party of reckless adventurers. Fate smiled upon his house, however, and Seoman was restored to life with the aid of a priest of Myhriss. Foes of the Skeptics have pointed to this event as evidence of the truth (and great mercy) of the gods, while the Skeptics themselves have struck back with claims that Seoman Verle's injuries were in fact less than mortal, and that aid of other sort would have served just as well.

Whether slain or just grievously wounded, the experience has left Verle a changed man. His once jovial manner is a thing of the past, and servants and family alike have noticed him becoming more taciturn and driven, working late hours into the wee hours of the night. His change of heart has many concerned, though few dare speak about it. Those who have been sternly disciplined, and two have even been released from his employ. The ledger of House Verle has smiled upon these vents, however, as profits and trade increased markedly, and expenditures for wine have dropped dramatically. It has been rumored that Seoman Verle has given up his love of the grape entirely, though most view this as foolish gossip. As the profits gradually trickle down to those in the employ of House Verle, members of other houses have remarked that many might benefit if the other houses followed his example. As one Oeridian farmer put it, "We can only hope!"

In the Honorable Chamber, the biggest question has been what to do with the nine empty seats left after the expulsion of House Teranor. Since Teranor's recent fall and dissolution, the Honorable Chamber has voted to officially remove all former nobles of House Teranor from their chairs. The vote was unanimous with the sole exceptions of House Meissel, who cited a difference of opinion with the phrasing, and House Teranor, who were forbidden from voting. The Honorable Chamber, with the final disposition of those holdings awaiting further decision, has claimed the wealth and holdings of House Teranor. Many are anxious to use the funds to bolster up their favored interests, and the debate is expected to last a considerable amount of time.

In related news, the centaurs of the Scouring Wind tribe, recently relocated to the Teranor lands, are not faring well, and their future survival is in doubt. Since the arrival last year, half of the tribe is on the verge starvation, and the rest have disbanded, their whereabouts now unknown. It is quite likely that the centaur tribe's second year in Duchy lands will be their last.

Yet another proposal to recognize House Burlondin as potential members of the Honorable chamber has been rejected. Unlike previous proposals, however, this vote was not the near-unanimous repudiation of prior years. Burlondin representatives, though disappointed, see this as a favorable development. Later in the same session, proceedings were disrupted during the trade reports of House Meissel by loud and threatening outbursts from members of House Szabo. The offending parties were ejected from the room, and harsh warnings were issued against further behavior of that nature.

With that out of the way, Lord Seoman Verle had many new proposals regarding Duchy laws. He argued long and hard for sweeping change in the Duchy of Urnst, necessitated by a drop in tax revenues, impending threats from the southern borders, and most importantly by the many alarming events of the past year. Reforms presented and entered into the books include higher taxes and restrictions on the trade of alcohol, tariff increases on imported goods, stiffer penalties for piracy and banditry, increased border patrols, an increase in the military budget, and restrictions on tax-funded "noble pleasures". This last proposal, of course, resulted in the most murmuring throughout the council. The discussion of alcohol lead to remarks about the appropriate fate for Delina Coriner, previously accused of poisoning Lord Verle's wine just prior to the fall of Heron House. As no other culprit has been found, many have wondered loudly if the death penalty is appropriate for Lady Coriner. Others theorized that since the poisoning was unsuccessful in any event, that mercy is the wisest course of justice. More than a few commented at Lord Verle's fondness for lethal and near-lethal events. After another hour of philosophical debate about the meaning of life and death, the plausibility of Verle's claimed death, and whether or not theft or murder was the greater crime, the Honorable Chamber broke for dinner.