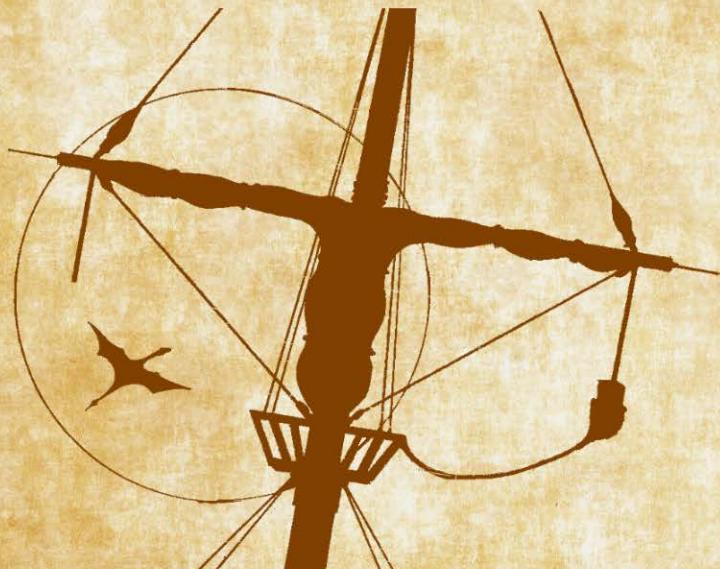


CHRONICLES OF ARBORELL

SONG OF THE DROMAPPION



THE JOURNAL OF EMMERS NAHR, CHRONICLING THE
VOYAGES OF THE LAST FLEET OF MEN TO THE
NEW WORLD OF ARBORELL.

WAYNE F DENSLEY

Song of the Dromannion



Written and Illustrated by Wayne Densley
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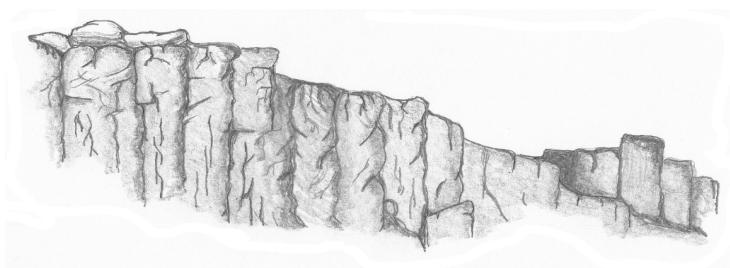
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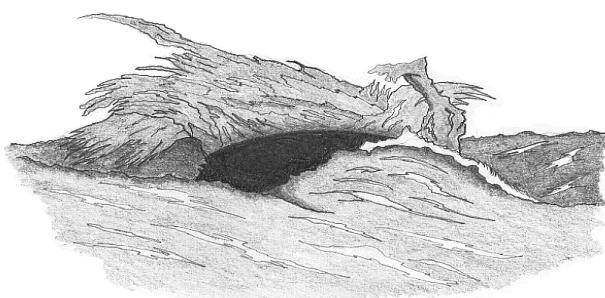
Introduction to the Journal of Emmers Nahr



The stories of the Four Nations are many but only one tells the tale of the Last Fleet of Men to leave the Old World, and of their journey to the lands of Arborell. The Song of the Dromannion is that story. Lost for more than nine hundred years it has recently been found in the possession of the Faeyen, and has only now been translated from the lost languages of Men.

In this journal can be found the personal account of a simple man who fled the power of an Enemy that knew no fear and granted no mercy. Within these pages is the story of a great Fleet, one that crossed from a world of violence and death into another of magic and uncertainty, where the earth itself could come to life, and the power to move the heavens themselves might rest comfortably in the palm of your hand.

Here for your consideration is the journal of Emmers Nahr, a refugee from the tyranny of the Old Enemy and one of the first settlers of Arborell. His is a story of desperation and hope as the last remnants of Mankind flee the power of a great evil. In the west can be found their salvation, they need only survive the journey.



From the Old World into the West



Four days from home

We have fled the Enemy. Four days have passed without sight of land and all I can see before me is the endless undulation of the sea as we travel southwards. As I stand upon the foredeck of this great ship there is only the rolling wash of the ocean ahead, and the scattered formation of our fleet at all sides as it struggles against the power of the waves. The Enemy is behind us, it is our hope that we are safe for the moment, but it provides me with little comfort. Four days out of port and we have all come to realise the one fact that matters. We are alone.

For those of us who have survived there is little reason for joy or relief. We have left everything behind, and know that what has been left has been destroyed. That is how the Enemy works, and there is nothing that can be done to stop it. We must flee for it is all that we can do. Nothing can now be as it was, all that I had in the world is now gone. My heart aches for the loss, yet it seems such a short time since the Enemy arrived in our world. It is indeed difficult to believe that everything we have known has faded into history. It all happened far too quickly.

For posterity it should be recorded that barely a year has passed since the first sighting of the Enemy. We cannot give it a name for none have seen it openly and lived. It arose in the north, begetting itself of the cold, barren lands that Men have always shunned and grew into an army that none could stand against. In their multitudes great creatures of war gathered and advanced upon the free lands of Men, a force of reckless violence that destroyed everything in its path, killing all who might stand before its unrelenting malice.

And stand before it we did. As one the Free Nations rose to meet the threat, vast armies mustered and sent to war. None came back. One

by one our homelands were overrun, and as each was consumed by the shadow of the Enemy they fell into oblivion, never to have their names uttered again. In these times of conflict tales began to filter from the front-lines of cruelty and death, and of annihilation. Populations fled before the power of the Enemy and slowly its shadow smothered all the peoples of the world, until all that remained was one small pocket of land, a port-haven upon the western edge of Adoracia. Here the remaining nations of Man waited for the end.

It was only at this time, when all hope had faded, and the creatures of the Enemy were within sight, that the surviving scholars of the Free Nations placed before us the only way we might survive as human beings in a darkening world. We could evacuate to the sea and take our chances there, rather than await the onslaught of the Enemy.

For those who may one day read this it must be understood that we are not a sea-faring people. The Free Nations of Adoracia do not tread the unsure paths of the open ocean, it is our nature to keep to the shoreline and do our trading in calmer waters. The idea of evacuating to the Grey Sea was unthinkable to most. Only some boarded ship, the rest stayed behind to fight until the end. I decided to take my chances on the rolling deck of this ship, the Dromannion. I am glad that I did.

Four days we have now been at sea and still the plumes of smoke billow on the north-eastern horizon. None of us can know what happened to the port-city once we left harbour, but the fires have been visible for days and we can only assume that all have been lost to the shadow. Now there is only these few ships and the open waters of the sea. This is now our world. The Free Nations of Man are gone, I can only assume that we are their remnants, refugees upon an ocean that have no safe port to return to, no haven in a troubled world that can be called home. We are indeed alone.

When I get the chance I will write again. Perhaps one day someone will read this journal and decide that it is a story worth re-telling. I can only ask that the subtle hand of Providence prove kind to us on our journey, for I do not know where the winds may take us.

Day Six

The sixth day of our flight from the enemy has passed into sunset and it is only now that a true measure has been taken of the fleet and its evacuees. We have been becalmed for most of the day, the Fleet slowly riding the southerly current that has kept us moving further from Adoracia and the ashes of our homes. For five days the wind has blown constantly from the north, and in our haste to put great distance between ourselves and the Enemy, the ships of this fleet have rode the wind south, taking us further into the open ocean. It seems that we have not yet decided where it is that we must go. It is a question that will need to be answered.

With no wind to carry us further the Captains of the Fleet have ordered a muster, and in its prosecution an accurate accounting of our stocks and provisions. The day has been spent thus, bringing all the ships of the Fleet together and determining the quantity of our number. Such a sight I have not seen before. Upon the languid ebb of the sea, ships both great and small have been mustered, and from their holds and passenger decks a great multitude has arisen to be counted and listed. Of all the Free Nations only the souls aboard these ships remain, and upon the vastness of the Grey Sea they are small enough.

At final count the Fleet stands at 46 vessels, of which only 23 are properly equipped for passengers. The Dromannion, the ship upon which I am embarked, is the largest of all, a Merchantman of some renown apparently and the only ship in the fleet armed to defend itself. Within the wood and iron hulls of these vessels it has been determined can be found 2,850 souls, of which only 419 are crewmen. Lists of all persons abroad each ship have been posted with the Captains of the Dromannion and the Avernell, another Merchantman of smaller displacement but similar renown. It would seem that our provisions are good, enough for six weeks at full ration. Whether this will be sufficient is unknown for we have not yet decided where we are to go.

I can say with some pride that I have been chosen as an assistant to the only Healer aboard. Some six hundred persons have made their

home on this great ship but only one Healer has been found. The Captain, whose name is Duschet, has chosen myself and five others to learn the Healer's craft. I am not sure that such a responsibility is something I have the aptitude for, but all who are aboard now find themselves thrust into new vocations. It has been made plain to us by the Captain that the only way the Dromannion can survive the days ahead is if we work together. This task has been given to me and I intend to do the best that I can.

I write these words as I sit upon the foredeck and watch the slow rise and fall of the sea. It is the early evening and the suns have just set in the west. The sky is clear, no cloud has been visible for most of the day and within the feeble light of a navigation lantern I find that I have a rare moment of solitude. It is something difficult to find aboard. The Dromannion is a three-masted vessel, overhead great sails lay furled at their yards, the foremast and its spiderweb of rigging silhouetted against the brightness of both moons. In the light of Elanna and Shabel the sea lies almost grey in colour, and at all sides I can see other ships of the Fleet slowly rocking as they are carried by the current. There is still no wind, and as I write the only sound that I can hear is the slow creaking of the ship as it sways in its watery bed. Here the world seems at peace, but I have been told by one of the older crewmen of this vessel that the ocean has many faces, and most are not so benign.

*D*ay Eight.

Finally the wind has once again arisen. Straight from the north it blows and in its bluster the Fleet has returned to full sail. Captain Duschet has taken sixty young men from the number of his passengers as cadet seamen, and now trains them in the ways of his craft. He will need all the help he can get. In the strengthening wind the sea itself has awoken and as we forge our way south once again the question has been raised as to where we must go. We cannot traverse the endless spaces of this ocean forever, though for the moment most seem content to head south.

Contentment is not the province of all aboard however. Many who have made the decision to evacuate are having second thoughts, their

presence aboard the Dromannion a cause for constant bickering and complaint. They do not seem to understand the finality of their passage with the Fleet, but have instead determined to make life miserable for all those around them. As an assistant to the Healer Faren I am forced to spend more time than should be necessary administering to the complaints and diversions of these people. They cannot go back, yet the more I speak with them I can see that they have not yet grasped the enormity of the losses they have suffered. It is as if they are trying to deny the totality of the Enemy's victory. I can only assume that we all handle catastrophe in different ways, and if that is so, then I will need to pay more attention to this expression of their grief.

I can record also that today the Dromannion has been chosen as flagship. This is understandable. By a wide margin it is the largest ship in the Fleet and carries the most of our number within. Captain Duschet has proven himself an able leader and it would seem that he has taken on the role of First Captain. There is much work to be done, and more than anything else in such times men need leaders. I believe the Captain understands this, his officers have all pledged themselves to his commands. Most other captains have done the same. It will be interesting to see whether such a diverse group of people as ourselves can work together to survive the journey ahead. Considering the histories of our nations it will be very surprising indeed if we do.

The Fleet is making good time with the wind at our backs. There is cloud on the horizon though. A storm is coming...

Day Nine

The true nature of the sea has revealed itself to us and tragedy has followed. Two ships have been lost and still the storm pounds at the Fleet, scattering us like flotsam as wind and wave tear at our vessels. Within its gales the Dromannion crashes from crest to trough and there is no respite from the power of the watery tempest as it assaults the ship. Below decks many have succumbed to wave sickness and it is only the constant attention of the Healer Faren that keeps most of our number working as we attempt to maintain the merchantman

afloat. Pumps must be manned and in the fury of the storm I can see the heaving of the deck and the bright flash of lightning outlining the desperate attempts of the crew to keep the ship together.

Amongst all this the Captain remains steadfast. He must know the strength of his ship, and in the glare of the storm's power he seems sure that it can take the relentless pounding. I take great heart from this for in his surety I know that we will survive. What it will do to the remainder of the Fleet fills me with dread however. They have given me only a few moments of rest and I can write no more. It is time for me to return to my station at the pumps.

Day Ten

The morning has come and in its red glare the devastation of the storm has been revealed. The Dromannion lists badly to starboard, all the lower decks have been evacuated as extra pumps are brought into use to stabilise its floundering. I can say that even though we are exhausted from the fury of the night we have saved the ship nonetheless. Providence has granted us a reprieve from the wind and high seas, and in the ensuing calm the Captain and his officers are attempting to pump the holds and clear the lower decks of wreckage.

Upon the upper decks we have been given no respite from our labours. A night at the pumps has been replaced for all the Healer's assistants by the grim work of helping the injured and preparing the dead for burial. With the lower decks flooded the upperdeck is crammed with people awaiting the all clear to return below. At the stern of the ship carpenters are working earnestly to repair a damaged mizzen mast and most of the rigging has collapsed upon the quarterdeck. It will take most of the day to effect repairs and it is fortunate that the weather has calmed. I have never been in such a storm and I truly do not wish to endure one again. For all its power the losses aboard the Dromannion have been slight. Two dead and twenty-seven injured. Three of the cadets are missing however. A search has found nothing and we must assume they have been washed overboard.

I have been given the job of preparing the dead for burial and it is a task not to my liking at all. Both men died from falls, their bodies crushed and their features smashed by the action of wave and broken wreckage. One of the Sailmakers has helped to show me how this must be done, and thankfully it has proven a straightforward process. To be properly prepared the bodies are wrapped in pieces of sailcloth and then stitched into tight bundles. Iron weights from the ship's ballast are then secured to the feet to ensure that they find their way to their inevitable rest within the dark reaches of the sea. Tomorrow they will be buried. I am not sure if I am supposed to attend.

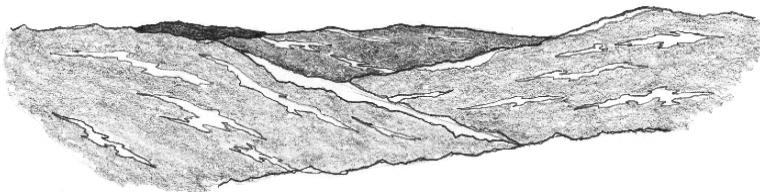
After the midday meal the Captain's Clerk came to Healer Faren's Surgery. A decision has been made on the objectives of our voyage and Faren has been called to attend a meeting of Staff Officers. Such meetings have proven to be one of the unforeseen benefits of my new vocation, and one for which I am very thankful. The Captain of the Dromannion seems eager to ensure his Healers are fully informed on all the activities of the ship, and through Faren we find out everything that is going on. This day some important decisions have been made and I cannot help but think that the damage caused by the storm has hastened the Fleet's need to find safe anchorage. Two ships have been lost already and as we await the return of Faren it is my hope that Captain Duschet and his Officers have found a suitable haven for us all.

Shortly before dusk the Healer returned to the upperdeck with news that a decision had indeed been made. We are to travel further south to the Kingdoms of the Haarn and entreat with them for sanctuary. It is something that is to be kept amongst ourselves however. The Haarn have never been friends of the Free Nations but the onslaught of the Enemy may have tempered their antagonism. It is hoped that a diplomatic approach may secure a small piece of ground upon which we might rebuild our lives. It is hoped also that the Enemy has no ambitions in the desolation of the south and that we might be left in peace.

Faren says it will take three days to make the port of Suul but in this endeavour we are to be careful. The main fleet is to continue due south whilst the Dromannion and two other vessels are to head towards the coast of the Haarn. If all is well, and we find safe

harbour there, then word shall be sent to the rest of the fleet. If all is not well the Fleet will continue on under the command of the Avernell to whatever fate awaits it.

About me the carpenters are hard at work and I have no more time for my journal. The injured have been tended but the activities of this ship never end. It is time for rest, my watch will not start until first light and already it is shaping up to be another busy day.



Day Eleven

Our expedition to the lands of the Haarn has been delayed. Overnight a meeting was held between Captain Duschet and the captains of the other vessels that would take part in the diplomatic mission. Faren attended, along with a number of other important officers of the Fleet. It seems that considerable argument was put forward that the Dromannion should not go. Most believed too many people were aboard for the ship to undertake such a risky venture. Duschet did not agree, he had his own reasons for having the Dromannion go, but relented as an alternative proposal was put forward by the Captain of the Equinox. One that was eagerly accepted by the remaining officers.

Three ships are to go as planned, but all will be fast scout vessels. No one knows if the Enemy has reached south into the lands of the Haarn, and it has been decided that we are to first ascertain whether there is any danger from the Enemy before approaching the Haarn for help. Harian Rendell, Captain of the Equinox will go eastwards with his ship and two others, the Allahard and the Kalborea. All are fast ships, ex-smugglers from the north coast and all capable of navigating shallow waters. Given good winds it will take less than three days for them to reach the coast, and if all seems safe one of the

ships will return to then bring the Dromannion to the port city of Suul. It has been agreed that a large ship such as the Dromannion will make an impression on the Haarn. At that point diplomacy can determine if a home awaits us in those inhospitable lands.

With such news the morning of this eleventh day has begun with great commotion and activity. All three of the ships that are to go have evacuees aboard, and all are to be transferred temporarily to the Dromannion for the duration of the expedition. The transfer of the peoples on these ships has presented us with a difficult situation however. Those that have come aboard from the Kalborea are all sick and Faren has been forced to quarantine them below the foredeck until it can be determined what illness afflicts them. The crew of the Kalborea strangely, seem unaffected. It is a mystery that will not stop the ship from taking part in the mission, but the Healer has ordered that no replacement crew go aboard her. For the duration the Kalborea will be isolated from the remaining fleet. This will be at least until it can be determined what is wrong with her evacuees.

Food and provisions have been stowed aboard the ships and now we wait for the order to leave. Faren came to the surgery at midday and chose myself and another Healer's Assistant by the name of Ahlek Norahm to join the complement of the Equinox and the Allahard. Our duties aboard these ships will be minor, our only direction being to assist the crew if any injuries or illness might arise on the voyage. I have been placed upon the Equinox and as I write this we stand on a parallel course to the main body of the Fleet awaiting the provision of the last supplies to the Allahard. The Equinox is a small ship, no more than a coastal cutter, but it feels solid in the wash of the sea. After the size of the Dromannion I must confess that I feel uneasy about setting sail in such an insubstantial vessel. Against the flanks of the flagship it is small and without armament. It is my fervent hope that its speed will prove our best defence against any possible danger.

At two bells after midday the flags were raised upon the main mast of the Dromannion and the three ships of the expedition swung eastwards. The Equinox leads, Captain Rendell in command of the mission to the Haarn. For my part there is little that I need do. I have been given a berth in the lower deck of the ship but I have chosen to

spend my time above decks, watching the eastern horizon and talking with those members of the crew who have the opportunity to stop and pass the time. One crew member in particular has struck me as unusual. To the rest of the crew he is simply known as Stump, and as yet I cannot find out why he is called this. I do have a suspicion though that it has something to do with his height. He is very tall, with the sharp angular features of a northerner, but this is not what sets him apart from the remainder of the complement of the Equinox.

I have had the opportunity of speaking with him on two occasions and there is something in his manner that belies his occupation. He is intelligent and well-educated, and bears himself as if he was once a man of great importance. It is intriguing to me. I find as I spend more time upon these ships that I have grown very curious of the stories of those I meet. The circumstances of our flight have pulled us all closer together, and now we all appear far more important to each other. It is a curious thing. I have determined that I shall know the full story of this man they call Stump. If nothing else it will help fill the idle moments that may be found on this voyage.

The remainder of the day has passed, and the last glimpses of the Fleet have disappeared into the west, the Dromannion the last to fall beneath the horizon. As the suns set the Equinox forges its way to the east, the seas becoming rougher as cloud-banks form to the north. In the blusters of approaching weather the ships of our small expedition rise and fall in the steady swell that is building beneath us. Sails are at full stretch and all three ships drive forward, tacking against a steady northerly wind. These ships have proven themselves to be very fast. I take great heart in their speed and ability to manoeuvre, and I am beginning to look forward to the adventure that lies before us.

Before I put down my ink I must recount a most unusual occurrence. From the east have come vast flocks of birds and even as I write their teeming multitude still courses overhead, winging directly into the west and the unknown expanses of the sea. At first I mistook the exodus as some normal occurrence, a migration well-known to the crew that have sailed the coastal trades before me. But as I look at the faces of those standing at my side I can see that they are as awed as I by the vast confusion of bird-life. Many different species have made their way overhead, and it mystifies me as to where they may be going. But they are fleeing from something, of this I am sure.

In the gloom of the evening the birds continue overhead, and I watch with the other crew in silence as they make their way west. There is the look upon many of the faces of the watching sailors that this is not a good portent of what we may find upon the coasts of the Haarn.



Day Twelve

A new day has arrived with clear skies and a strong wind blowing at our backs. In the night the storm moved from the north into the west and with its passing came a turn in the wind that has pushed the flotilla with greater speed eastwards. Ahead I can see only sea but I have been told that we are less than twenty leagues from the coast and only a few leagues more from the capital of the Haarn at Suul. Captain Rendell called his officers to his cramped quarters and I was summoned as well. All three ships have made good time and his Second Officer reports that we should make the coastline by nightfall. The Equinox has proven itself a stout ship, racing before the bluster of the winds, cutting through the waves as it speeds to the east. I find I have little to do but the crew seems appreciative of the fact that I am here. I do not believe any of them have been told that I am just a Healer's Assistant, and an inexperienced one at that.

The flocks of birds that filled the sky on the preceding evening have disappeared into the west. No further movements have been seen and those that watch from the crow's nest above report no sign of land ahead. I while away my time writing and talking with the crew, and find that the life of the crewman aboard these ships can be hard. The Captain does not suffer fools easily, and has no trouble in loudly pointing out the deficiencies of his men. In other circumstances he could be considered rude and overbearing but I have no doubt that he is an able Sea-Captain. What he thinks of me I cannot tell. I believe such opinions will no doubt be put to me at the first instance of the testing of my skills. It seems to be his way.

I have spent the day in pursuit of more information on the man known as Stump. He is well liked by all but few can provide any real

information about his past. Most know him only as a willing crewman who presented himself for work a short time before the fall of the northern ports of Adoracia. Who he was before walking onto the Equinox is unknown. Given such a lack of readily available information I have decided to approach him directly. I am sure that there is a story behind this man that I can record here as a part of my journal.

Closer we forge towards the coast and again I find myself looking towards the north. Storms yet again build upon the far horizon and this time they are spreading outwards, covering the sky as they advance in our direction. The Equinox and its two brethren continue to ply a path eastwards, the winds changing now, veering to the north and west as the storm moves closer. As I watch the captain prepares his crew, ordering the securing of the ship and signalling to the Allahard and the Kalborea to prepare themselves for the coming tempest. In response they have distanced themselves, taking up positions far to the port and starboard of the Equinox. All the ships have been set for the approaching weather and as a consequence have slowed. Sails have been lowered and sea-anchors thrown out to stabilise the ships in the building seas. The coasts of the Haarn will have to wait until after this storm has passed.

I can do nothing to help except prepare for the practice of my new vocation. The Captain has placed me in the ship's forward galley, which I have cleared for any injured that may be brought below. It is my fervent hope that the storm that approaches will not prove as deadly as the last. This ship does not feel large enough to survive it.



Day Thirteen

The night has passed and it has been an eventful one. The storm hit shortly after dusk, a tempest of rain and wind that thrashed the small ships as they fought its power. I stayed below decks. The Equinox took the brunt of the storm head-on, pitching and rolling in its swell as waves crashed over its decks. In the galley I tried not to think of the

desperate battle being fought above, instead I waited, hoping that not too many of the crew would be brought below. Over the course of the night six of the crew were carried to me, four with broken bones and two with deep gashes that required treatment. Thankfully all were injuries that I had previously had experience with. All are now resting, only one offers further concern, his leg broken in such a manner that it will need to be reset by the Healer Faren upon our return to the Fleet. For the moment though he is off his feet and none the happier for it.

By morning the storm had passed to the south and in the quiet of the early hours the three ships began to move once again. In the fury of the storm it seems that we have been pushed much closer to the coast than had been expected. As I have tended to the injured I can hear the Captain above shouting orders and the sounds of fevered activity as his sailors carry them out. By all accounts the coast is already in view from the heights of the crows-nest. Nothing can be seen so far.

Midday had us parallel to the coast and moving south, looking for any sign of the outposts of the Haarn. Their capital at Suul is our objective but as of yet we have found nothing. In the early afternoon I took the time to get some fresh air and spent most of it looking port-side, searching the coastal fringes for some sign of life, any life. A number of the crew also watched with me. It is disconcerting that we have not yet seen anything.

The coast is a barren landscape. It is getting colder as we go and I now see the harsh nature of these lands. Stony beaches edge desolate ground beyond and in places cold cliffs rise out of the sea. It is a jagged, dangerous piece of coastline that seems devoid of trees or beckoning shelter. None of us have seen any standing dwelling or evidence of normal life, and as we stare into the bright light of the afternoon I can say that these lands are not welcoming. I am having doubts that a worthwhile home can be found here.

The Equinox rises and falls with the sea's undulation and we have a stiff wind at our backs. Behind us sail the Allahard and the Kalborea, and it cannot be long before Suul will rise out of the coast to the south. I have been told that it is a magnificent port-city, known for the exotic wares that can be found there. Most of all though, it has a

reputation for building huge spires of stone, capped with lights that shine out into the Grey Sea as beacons to its ships. Unlike our own, the Haarn are travellers of the open ocean. Surely we must see some sign of their capital soon.

It was at the last light of dusk that a call came from the watchmen high above. Suul has been sighted. Quickly the crew drew the ship closer to the shoreline and carefully we made our way closer. I was on the quarterdeck when the main bulk of the city came into view. What we saw took our breath away, but only for a moment. Immediately the Captain shouted orders and the crew set to work. The Equinox did not have to signal to the other ships, they saw it as well and together they turned back towards the open sea, cutting a path just south of west. I will try and describe what it was that I saw although it grieves me to do it.

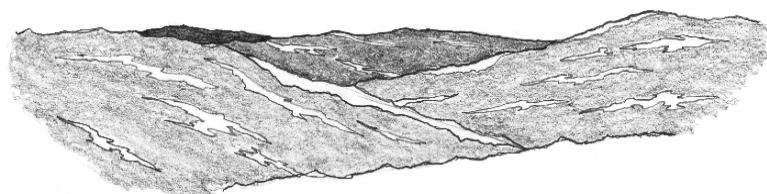
Suul has been destroyed. The great spires that would have shown a way to the safe harbour of this city are gone, smashed to the ground by some force that I do not understand. Ships lay broken and wallowing in the harbour, and as far as the eye could see the buildings and homes of its inhabitants lay in ruins. There was no smoke, nor any sign of the Haarn themselves, just rubble piles that spilled down from the hills at the harbour's back into the cold waters of the harbour itself. Some power had been used on the city that had ground and crushed its structures, obliterating a thousand years of endeavour and toil, turning everything to dust and splintered stone. The Enemy has been here and has moved on.

It was only as we had turned from the city and were moving back into deep waters that we saw the flying creature. Above the city flew a gigantic reptilian beast, wings spread wide as it glided in tight circles about the ruins of Suul. I cannot say for sure but it appeared to be looking for something, and when it found it, swooped low into the broken streets before disappearing from view. Even above the sounds of the crashing waves and the gusting wind we could all hear a piercing shriek that sent shivers down our spines. If there had been any doubt it was now gone. There would be no sanctuary found amongst the Haarn.

Day Fourteen

We have spent this day tracking away from the coast, heading into deep waters as we return to a pre-arranged position some sixty leagues out to sea. If we are lucky the remainder of the Fleet should be waiting for us. The daily activity of the Equinox has not diminished, a ship at sea has many needs and the men of this ship work tirelessly to keep it seaworthy, but I have noticed that most of the men are subdued in their efforts. All the shouting and cursing of their captain does not alter the feeling that has infected the ship that they have failed, and that this leaves the Fleet with no objective, no place to go. I am as disheartened as they, but I have not yet lost hope that there is a place for us somewhere.

The Haarn can provide no sanctuary. They have met an end that I cannot conceive of, and this fills me with sadness. They were not friends of the Free Nations but they were powerful, and in their demise we have witnessed the true ferocity of our Enemy. I can think that there is only one alternative left to us. In my heart I know we must strike out into the unknown reaches of the ocean and trust to Providence that new lands might await us there. It may be true that the only defence we can build against such a powerful foe is distance. If such a course is to be taken it will be one filled with risk. We will either succeed or we will die trying.



Day Fifteen

We continue to move further into deep waters. The Fleet has not yet been sighted and I find my time divided between caring for those few crew that still remain in need of treatment and wandering the ship annoying those who seem to have time to spare. In the course of my

investigation of the Equinox I have had the opportunity to speak to the Captain on more than one occasion. For an ex-smuggler he is very willing to share the details of his exploits, and does not seem to mind confessing openly to anyone who will listen of the illegal operations he has been a party to. I asked him whether it might be prudent for him not to be so forthcoming, but he just laughed and stated that the old world was gone. Whatever we may have done, or not done for that matter, in the past was now of little consequence. It would now be what we do on this great adventure that will determine our worth. None of the peoples aboard the Fleet could care less if you were a pirate or a saint, just as long as you got them to safety. I could see his point.

Later I thought on the Captain's words. If we were indeed fortunate enough to find a safe harbour somewhere beyond the reach of the Enemy, then there would be many things that would need to change. The old structures of our societies had gone, trampled beneath the shadow of the Enemy. A new land would require new rules, new ways to organise our lives, new ideas and new leadership. It will be an interesting process if we are given the opportunity to exercise it.

The sea runs quickly beneath the Equinox as we fly before the wind. The afternoon of this day has the gusting breeze shifting from the east to the north, and these three ships are taking full advantage of it. Captain Rendell says we should meet with the Fleet by nightfall tomorrow and I will be glad to return to the Dromannion. The Equinox is a fine ship, however my service aboard her has shown me that I know little of my new craft. I need to return to the tutelage of the Healer Faren so that I might be able to learn more, and be of greater value to our endeavour. I am afraid that the other skills I possess would be of little use at sea.

Before the coming of the Enemy I can say with great pride that I was a Master Potter, a maker of sturdy clay earthenware. I spent most of my life in a small village by the name of Wolston, just a short distance from the outskirts of Anglemath, a port city of western Adoracia, and was apprenticed at a young age to a competent potter by the name of Arion Cael. Long was the time that I spent indentured to my Master's kilns, but the day came when I was granted my tickets to the Faeyen Guilds and became my own Master. In the world that we have left I

was a Faeyen, a member of the professional Guilds that controlled most of the commerce and industry of the Free Nations. It was a membership that meant something, and was something one could declare with pride. But that was before the coming of the Enemy. In such circumstances as we now find ourselves it means little. Survival must now dictate that we do those things that are necessary. Perhaps one day I might return to my chosen profession, but for the moment I have found a different calling.

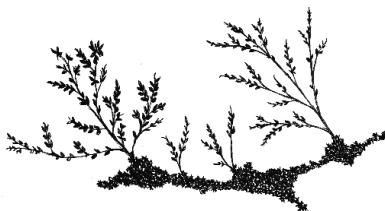
Before I end this day's account I must put ink to paper on two most unusual happenings, one that I can only describe as curious, the other as almost disastrous. The first occurred an hour prior to dusk. In the slanting light of the suns a great shadow moved between the Equinox and the Kalborea. At first those who saw it thought a vast creature was flying overhead, laying its darkness on the sea below, but this proved not to be the case. For indeed it was a sea creature of monstrous proportion that moved beneath the waves, keeping a parallel course to our ships. Only once did it rise to the surface and it proved to be an enormous beast, dark grey in colour, as long as it was wide and possessed of thick triangular fins that protruded from its sides as wings might on a bird. It did not appear to have a head, however it did open a huge gaping mouth that swallowed vast amounts of water as it rose and fell with the waves. At its rear stretched a long tail, almost whip-like in design. From gaping maw to the base of its tail it extended more than three times the length of the Equinox. This behemoth of the deep did not seem interested in us at all, which we were all thankful for, but instead kept a similar course for some distance before disappearing again into the depths. I cannot give any account of what it might be, nor whether it is a danger. I have no doubt though that if it had wished us harm it could have destroyed us with impunity.

The second sighting of note came just before dusk. Even as the crew of the Equinox debated on the appearance of the Behemoth, we were surprised by a far more active and far more dangerous phenomena. In the orange glow of sunset the sky to the north grew dark with cloud. For most of the day we had enjoyed clear skies, and the distraction of the sea-creature's rising from the deep allowed the sudden appearance of the thunderhead at our starboard side to take the crew by surprise. Unlike most of the weather that I have

experienced whilst at sea this cloud stood alone, a huge anvil-shaped tower that rode the winds directly towards us. Captain Rendell had seen such clouds before and called the crew to readiness. Quickly the flotilla turned away from the approaching stormcloud and it was not a moment too soon. As the cloud approached, the wind rose to a gale, a ragged bluster torn with seaspray that obscured the surface of the sea as it went. Without warning the air beneath the cloud began to spin, whipping up the waters beneath it. It took less than a few seconds for a twisting column of water to form, somehow supported by the power of the winds generated within the cloud. As the twisting column spun before us the winds ripped at the ship's sails, heeling the Equinox to the port and laying it low in the water on that side. Crew scrambled into the rigging, collapsing the sails as the waterspout writhed before us.

Closer it came to the ships and as it approached I could hear a sound like an approaching stampede of cattle. Never have I seen such a vast column of spinning water. Above us the cloud spread like the underside of some monstrous anvil and as I watched I could see other, smaller spirals of air beginning to form beneath its huge mist-edged bulk. Before the captain could make any further corrections the main waterspout twisted directly in front of the Equinox and then collapsed, spraying the decks with water, and laying huge quantities of debris upon the foredeck. The power of the winds tore the foresail from its holdings and would have thrown down the foremast if not for the sudden demise of its strength. Crew appeared from all parts of the ship, clearing the deck of torn sailcloth and shrouds, as the Wheelman swung the Equinox out of harms way, its bow digging deep into the waves as the cloud slipped harmlessly to the south. It did not attempt to assault us again.

Given the disappointments of the day's discoveries, and the surprising phenomena that the sea has presented to us I can only say that I am glad we are still alive. The sea is no place for those who do not understand its vagaries and I am glad that we have Captains such as Rendell to show us the way. I conclude by writing that this day ends in much the same way that it started. I find myself below decks, tending the injured and listening to the sounds of the Equinox as it creaks and groans to the rise and fall of the waves. It has been a long day and now I must find rest.



Day Seventeen

The last two days have passed without incident but we have not yet found the Fleet. Already we are one day beyond our rendezvous point and there has been no sign of the Dromannion or any of the other ships. The wind remains a strong southerly and we have spent the last day tacking a wide search in the hope that we might intersect with our compatriots. So far we have been unsuccessful. The crew grows unsure as to what we must do and I share their concern. If we cannot find the Fleet, if it has befallen some tragic end or been forced to move on without us, then we will be completely alone, with few options and almost no provisions.

At midday the Captain sent up the flags and called the Allahard and the Kalborea to his side. The wind had dropped off and whilst it remained abated he conversed with the other captains. Quickly a decision was made as to our next move. It was with no small relief that we found that plans had already been laid for such a contingency. When the other ships had pulled away Rendell called the crew together. Unlike most of his commands he could see the need to tell the crew what was going on and let nothing remain unsaid as he spoke.

With the Fleet nowhere to be found, he announced, it is now necessary that we find a harbour further south. There could only be two reasons as to why our brethren were not at the pre-arranged meeting point, and neither, as he put it, spelled any good news for us. They have either been forced to move on by some unknown danger, or have found an untimely rest in the depths beneath us. Their fate is unknown but on that point a plan had been decided with the captain of the Dromannion before we left. If there was no rendezvous then our small flotilla was to make a heading south to the farthest reach of

the Haarn Kingdoms, to a small fishing port known as Corin'kraag. There we are to wait for a period of one week. If the Fleet was not there when we arrived, this was as long as we should wait before deciding for ourselves what we should do next. This was all the crew of the Equinox needed to hear.

With a new destination before them the crew jumped to action. Quickly the ferment of their minds cleared and it was within the hour that we again found ourselves forging southwards with a strong wind at our backs. With new purpose the Equinox drove itself into the waves, and with the Allahard and the Kalborea in station behind we began the journey south, hopefully to meet with the rest of the Fleet at Corin'kraag.

It is good that we have a destination to journey for, however I have in my Surgery a problem of my own that is becoming more intractable with every passing hour. All of the injured I have been treating have either returned to duty or do not require further supervision as their wounds heal. All except one. Tilsal Obernoth still remains in my care and he causes me great concern. Unlike the others his injuries are beyond my ability to attend fully. His broken leg has been set and I have done the best that I can, but he now requires the attention of the Healer Faren and it had been my hope that by now he would be under his care. With the passing of these two days his condition has worsened and I am sure that an infection has found a purchase in his right leg. It is a malady that is beyond my current knowledge. I do wish fervently that the Healer Faren were here.



Day Eighteen

I have spent the night and most of this morning by the side of Tilsal Obernoth. As I have feared his leg is indeed infected, and in the dark hours he has developed a high temperature that I am attempting to control with cold cloths and herbs. So far I have been unsuccessful. Earlier today I spoke with the Captain. He believes that we are still

four days from Corin'kraag and although the Fleet may only be a day ahead of us there is no way that a message can be sent. Until we reach the southern boundaries of the Haarn I am on my own.

At midday my patient had an unforeseen visitor. All morning crew have been coming to enquire as to the health of Obernoth. He is well-liked by all and as he is still awake I could see nothing but the positive affect of having friends about him. I was surprised however, when the crewman Stump appeared at my door asking if he might sit for a while with the injured man. I needed rest myself and as the tall man seemed eager to spend time with his friend I left them to talk, and went out to get some air and enjoy the ever changing nuances of the open sea.

I had only twenty minutes to appreciate the salt air before an urgent call came from below. Obernoth had gone into convulsions. It was as I had feared, his temperature had risen to such a level that he had lost consciousness and began to fit. Quickly myself and Stump got the man up onto the deck and stripped away his shirt. The air has been growing progressively cooler and with the aid of wet cloths we were able to get his temperature down. I do not know if I have done the right thing but nothing can halt the spread of the infection in his leg. He remains unconscious and cannot be roused. If I cannot find something to mitigate his condition I believe Obernoth will die by the end of daylight tomorrow.

Day Nineteen

The morning has come and Obernoth has worsened. The infection spreads now from his leg into his groin and I know that if it is allowed to continue into his chest he shall not recover from it. In the dark of the night I have been wracking my memories trying to remember something told to me by the Healer Faren that will provide some relief for this man. It has been to no avail.

The Captain came to see how my patient was doing at first light. For all his cantankerous bluster he obviously cares greatly for the welfare of his crew and spent some time extracting everything I knew of his condition. I am convinced now that Obernoth will die by this evening

and in all frankness I had to tell the Captain of this. My thoughts gave him reason to pause but he did not seem surprised. As he left he asked only that his crewman be made as comfortable as possible in his final hours.

The day ahead is going to be a long one.

Day Twenty

Although I do not understand how it has come about crewman Obernoth is alive. Steadily over the preceding day his condition deteriorated until by nightfall his breath had become laboured and his temperature unbearably high. I called the Captain to my makeshift surgery and both of us waited quietly, expecting in all honesty to witness the dying man's last breaths. Stump also was at his side, he had just finished his watch, and together the three of us waited, considering the inevitability of death and how helpless we could be against its onslaught. It was a quiet vigil that was quickly disturbed.

At the first bell after dusk there came from the deck above a great commotion, a splintering sound that reverberated through the ship's timbers as if the mainmast was stressing under some enormous weight and was threatening to collapse. Immediately the Captain ran for the door and bade me to follow. If the main mast collapsed there could be injuries and I would be needed. I paused only to tell Stump to stay by the side of his friend. I could do nothing more for him, all that remained was the inevitability of his death and the sure knowledge that nobody should die alone. He nodded his understanding as myself and the Captain ran for the forward galleryway. It took only moments to reach the upper deck but to our surprise there was nothing to see. The response to the captain's flustered advance from the evening watch was just shrugged shoulders and a definite nothing to report.

Rendell knew what he had heard and ordered a careful survey of the main mast, its supporting rigging and all the ratlines and shrouds that held the mast to its ties. Nothing was found. The Master of the Equinox could not understand it, and ordered another search of the

foundations of the mast below decks. He did not enjoy such false alarms and stormed off towards the wheel-deck, throwing orders in all directions as his crew scrambled about the ship, trying to ascertain the cause of the noise that it seemed only myself and the Captain had heard.

With no work to do I returned to my surgery. In the dark of the evening there was little light in the forward galleyway, only a single lantern giving any illumination as the ship swayed to the sea's rhythm. Now I must record here that I cannot say exactly what it was that I saw as I made my way below, but I know I saw something.

Coming from behind the closed door of my Surgery there flickered a soft blue light that shone through the crack of the ajar doorway, and spread like the glow of moonlight into the corridor. I ran as fast as I dared to discover what this ethereal glimmer might be, but as I reached for the door's handle it faded, and then disappeared.

Upon opening the door I entered and found Obernoth raised on his elbow, looking about the room as if he had no recollection of why he was there. It was to Stump though that I first looked with most interest. He had fallen back against a tangled pile of rope and netting and lay there unconscious. But only for a moment. As I moved towards him his eyes opened and he raised his head. He looked as bewildered as myself and as one we both took stock of Obernoth's condition. Truly Providence had laid a hand upon the man, and as he watched both myself and Stump checked his injuries. The infection was gone, the temperature that had wracked his body had abated. By some act of Providence this man had been given the chance to survive.

When I had ascertained the extent of Obernoth's recovery I pulled Stump aside and would not let him go until I had some answers. He said he did not understand what had happened, only that a strange blue light had entered the room as he had sat with his friend, and in its glow he had seen the red stain of the man's infection retreat from his body and then fade from its source in his leg. I am not sure I believe him. He holds back something, the look in his eyes not the disturbed affect of someone who has witnessed such a miraculous phenomenon. Instead I got the distinct impression that he had something to do with it. It confounds me to think that this quiet man

might hold such power at his disposal, but I know he holds secrets very close to his chest. I will talk with him again before this voyage is done, and I will have the answers I seek. For the moment I must be thankful for the fact that Obernoth is alive.

*D*ay Twenty-two

With Obernoth's recovery a great weight has been lifted from my shoulders. His care now rests in his own ability to heal, and any new infection can be addressed when we join with the Fleet. The last days have been filled with the busy activity of the Equinox and an earnest search by myself for more information on the man Stump. He does not answer any questions that I pose to him directly. He will not even tell me his true name. I have only been able to garner the most basic of facts and even these tell me little.

From his other crewmates I can say with some assurance that he once belonged to the Fallanheim, a race of nomadic Belk-herders from the northern kingdom of Cammeray. With the rise of the Enemy these nomadic peoples were the first to flee southwards and bring knowledge of its power to the attention of the Free Nations. To all his friends he has only been known as Stump, and it strikes me as strange that such an obviously well-educated man should be a herder. The more I find out the more it vexes me.

On the morning of this twenty-second day of our odyssey we turned towards the coastline. By the reckoning of the Equinox's First Officer we are only fifteen leagues from Corin'kraag. The coast spreads out as a barren vista of rock and snow, broken by high cliffs and long gravel-beaches that give no sense of comfort or mercy. If any souls lived in these climes they surely must be men as hard as the rock they live on. The flotilla rides the waves easily, the sea subdued and calm as we speed towards a hopeful meeting with the Fleet. I now have little to do except lean against the balustrade on the port side of the ship and watch the coastline run away southwards. Like most of the crew on watch we look keenly for the first signs of masts at the horizon.

The port-haven of Corin'kraag was reached at midday, and in the icy bluster that greeted us as we turned into its sheltered harbour we found only devastation. As with Suul this smaller town is destroyed, its buildings crushed and broken, no sign of its inhabitants abroad. The Fleet is nowhere to be found, and in their absence we stand within sight of this port-haven unsure of what we should now do. If it is simply a matter that we have arrived first then we have no recourse but to wait. One week was the plan and Captain Rendell says he shall honour it.

Looking out at Corin'kraag there are none of us who can see any sign of the Enemy. Whatever force destroyed this once thriving port has now gone. It would seem that the town's broken remains have been left to dissipate before the relentless force of wind and ice. I can record without reservation that it is not the cold but the silence that sends a shiver up my spine.

At last light the word was spread through the ship. At the stroke of first bell in the morning a landing party is to go ashore and hunt for survivors and extra provisions. Only one small skiff is to go. Eight men and the Second-Officer Hallion commanding. It would seem that Healers are indispensable to such endeavours, as I shall be going with them.

Day Twenty-three

This first day of our sheltering in the harbour of Corin'kraag has passed and we have all been affected by the level of destruction that we have been forced to sift through. It is difficult to say how large the town was prior to its attack by the Enemy, but the rock-piles that fill the streets and boulevards of this settlement extend for some distance both north and south of the main harbour. Everything is rubble. There are no standing structures of any type, and nothing above ground level seems to have survived whatever pulverised the stone of these buildings, and splintered to matchwood every standing beam of timber.

The night before our expedition to the town proper was spent with watchful caution. No lights could be seen anywhere amongst the

ruins, and apart from the steady swell of the sea beneath us there was no noise or other sign that anything in Corin'kraag remained alive. Captain Rendell did not sleep. With his two officers at his side he surveyed the dark ruins from his wheeldeck, looking for any hint of danger. There was no sign of any movement at all. Only silence.

For my part I could not sleep either. The Fleet could be anywhere at this time and our only hope was to wait for their arrival. The Captain had given the order for us to go ashore and I spent most of the night wondering whether this was to fulfil some purpose, or simply to give the crews of these three ships something to do as we waited anxiously for any sign of our brethren. In the dark it is easy to think of all the things that might go wrong, of the dangers that may lurk within the stone piles of this unfortunate settlement. As I waited in my quarters for the inevitable summons I found myself pondering the strange turn of events that saw me feeling safer aboard this small ship than upon the shoreline that lay silent before us.

The first bell of the morning watch had me standing on the foredeck of the Equinox, watching as a small skiff was lowered from its davits into the calm waters of Corin'kraag harbour. Only the Equinox had moved closer into the sheltered waters of the port, both the Allahard and the Kalborea remained at anchor outside the remains of its crumbled jetties and seawalls. I cannot say that I enjoyed the short journey from the relative safety of the ship to the small gravel beach that we had chosen as our landing point. I sat at the bow of the skiff with Hallion, the second officer, and watched as the crew heaved at the oars, pushing us towards the shore.

Our landing was swift, the skiff sliding up on to the gravel beach and then holding fast as the crew jumped from their places to haul it further up the tideline. Quickly we all ran for what looked like the remains of houses lining the harbourside and then came to a halt. Our orders were clear, search the remains for survivors and take stock of any provisions that may have survived the attack. In pairs we spread out through the town, I went with Hallion, and began what would prove to be a harrowing but fruitful search.

Almost immediately myself and Hallion found ourselves lost in the endless piles of stone and shattered timber. From the safety of the

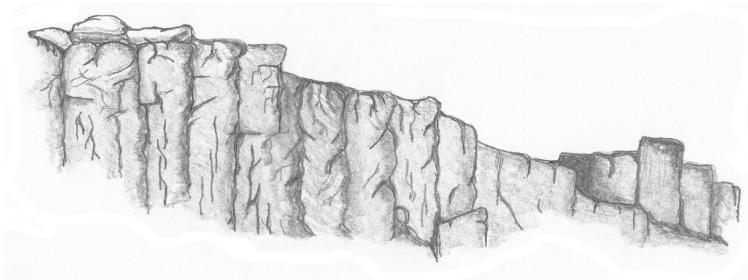
Equinox the devastation of the town was undeniable and frightening in its extent. Up close it was simply appalling. As we searched the remains of what appeared to be the main market district of Corin'kraag we could find nothing that was identifiable. Wood had been shattered so thoroughly that to pick a piece of timber from the ground would find it crumbling in your hands as you lifted it. The Haarn built mainly in stone and wood, and there was much evidence to be found for the remains of many large buildings both private and civic. But nowhere could we find a single piece of stone that did not fall away to dust as we handled it. Great piles of broken stone filled the streets of the town and all crumbled at the slightest movement or touch. It is a mystery to me what force could have so thoroughly pulverised these buildings, but amongst the ruins we have found hope that there may still be survivors here.

Hallion found the first sign of life as he made his way towards what we can only assume was Corin'kraag's Civic Hall. At the end of a wide boulevard lay a huge pile of tangled rubble, roughly laid out upon the ground as a long rectangular shape, bordered by wide dust covered gardens. Although nothing of the building itself survived, Hallion found the doors of a deep cellar collapsed upon the Hall's northern walls. The heavy wood of the cellar doors had been pulverised as everything else had, but the steps that led down below ground had been unaffected. It took the Second Officer only moments to confirm that the cellars were still sound, and more importantly contained large stocks of grain, spun wool and lantern oil. It was a find that underlined something we had not considered. The town itself may be gone, but whatever force destroyed its buildings did not seem to have damaged anything below ground. There was a chance here that we might find not only much needed supplies but survivors, trapped within cellars and basements, unable to reach daylight due to the weight of the fallen buildings above them.

Quickly we returned to the skiff, calling for the remaining members of our party to return as well. Upon the gravel-beach we reformed and all had a tale to tell of the appalling destruction. The focus of our search had changed however. There could be vast stores of food and other essentials locked beneath Corin'kraag and the possibility of survivors as well. Hallion made his decision without hesitation. The next few days of our wait at Corin'kraag were going to be very busy indeed.

As soon as we had returned to the Equinox, Hallion reported to the Captain of his findings. All the ships of our flotilla had empty holds and a capacity to carry large loads. For Rendell it was an opportunity sent by Providence that he could not ignore. By mid-afternoon all three ships were anchored close to our original landing point, dozens of crewmen scouring the rubble of the port, searching for sign of provision and survivors. Upon the beach a steady stream of foodstuffs and other supplies had begun to build, neat stacks of boxed goods and grain sacks that had to be listed and catalogued before being transported by skiff to the waiting ships.

Such work is not my province and I have taken no part in it. To transfer goods safely requires skills and experience that I do not have so Rendell placed me in amongst the search parties, hunting through the ruins, looking for any evidence that some of the Haarn may have lived through the destruction. So far the search for survivors has been unsuccessful. We have found no sign of the Haarn, nor of the Enemy. For the latter at least I am thankful.



Day Twenty-four

Our work in Corin'kraag continues, more cellars and basements being unearthed as we search the ruins. The weather has remained fine and the seas calm, the only sign of activity in the port our small beach-head where we continue to load stores and provisions that we believe will be of use to the Fleet. This second day has found me aboard the Equinox, busy in my Surgery with injuries caused by accidents during the search of the town. Thankfully I have been confronted with nothing serious. Only two members of the crew remain below decks. The crewman Obernoth seems happy to have the company of one his fellow crewmates, both will be remaining in

my care for at least the next week. I can record that our sojourn here has had a positive effect upon all the men of the flotilla. With a purpose before us we have all lightened in spirit and await the arrival of the rest of the Fleet with great anticipation. We certainly have something to show for our stay here but as of yet we have found no survivors.

During the mid-afternoon I was visited in my quarters by the Captain. At first he wished to talk of the injuries to his men, but after only a short discussion turned the conversation to the unusual events of the recovery of Tilsal Obernoth. He wanted to know all that had occurred, and asked of me detailed questions regarding the nature of the man's injuries and the glow that had emanated from the surgery. I got the distinct impression during this questioning that he had seen such an event before, and that the crewman Stump had something to do with it. In all honesty I could say that I knew little, only that Stump had been attending to Obernoth at the time, and that neither could remember anything of the injured man's amazing recovery. Rendell was not convinced of that. It was in the quiet of my rooms that the Captain spoke openly of what he knew about Stump.

The man had presented himself for work just a few days before the Enemy attacked the Equinox's home port of Amuron. The north of Adoracia had had no warning of the Enemy's advance and the Equinox lay in harbour, loading a legal cargo of wood planking for transportation south. Nobody was aware of the danger growing on the horizon and Rendell had eagerly taken aboard the tall northerner. He had needed willing hands and the man they would come to know as Stump had fitted into the routine of the sea very easily. As a smuggler he quickly proved even more valuable. The Captain had never asked how, but Stump possessed a wide range of contacts within the criminal underworld of the northern sea-ports. Information he gained was willingly shared on buyers who would pay good money for contraband that had avoided local taxes and charges. It was a boon Rendell did not wish to question and it was only after the Enemy had swept southwards that he began to consider the possibilities of who he might actually have aboard.

Like myself the Captain recognised quickly that Stump was different from the usual itinerant sailors he would sign to crew his ship. The

northerner was educated, self-assured and all too easily fitted into any circumstance that he might find himself. He displayed knowledge of the world that was not accessible to most, and as of yet Rendell had not found a language in Adoracia that the man did not have at least some practical understanding of. He was all too useful and yet all too secretive of his own past. In his own mind the Captain could only assume that Stump was a man using the Equinox as a place to hide, where he might remain unnoticed in the wider world and yet keep contact with those who were important to him. If such was the case then Rendell had no problem with him. In his employ a man's past could remain shaded, but only as long as that past did not return one day to cause harm to his ship or its complement.

As Providence would have it such a day came quickly to the Equinox, but the Captain did not recognise it until Obernoth was healed, then what had transpired before became all to clear in his mind.

Some two weeks before the evacuation from Adoracia of the Fleet, the Equinox had harboured in Mardon, unloading refugees from the north. Circumstances had become desperate and the steady flow of those refugees southwards had opened up considerable opportunity for anyone with a ship and the courage to sail to the besieged cities of the North Kingdoms. For Rendell and his crew the day had proved both routine and profitable. Refugees were being disembarked and new passengers were arriving for transport to the Islands of the Faen. In the midst of this activity nobody noticed a small group of hooded men that boarded ship and waited quietly upon the quarterdeck. In the Captain's own words what happened next was both brutal and efficient. Out of the dark recesses of their cloaks came hidden short-swords and systematically the assassins began striking down the crew, searching the ship's lower decks and causing pandemonium amongst the milling passengers.

At the moment of the assault Rendell saw it as an attack upon his ship in general and quickly a melee developed upon its broad decks. Refugees scattered in all directions and two of his crew went down in the initial charge, but the cloaked assailants had misjudged the nature of the men they were attacking. Smugglers do not take a step backwards when they are fighting for their ship, and they quickly overwhelmed the hooded assassins with their number, sending them

scurrying back onto the docks. It was a small victory for which the Equinox paid a high price. A number of his crew had been wounded, one seriously. Violence aboard ship was not unusual but such a blatant assault left the Captain and his crew searching for answers. It was only in retrospect that Rendell realised the assailants had not been after the ship but one of its crew.

After the melee the Equinox left port without delay. News of the harbour-side brawl quickly drew the scrutiny of the port authorities to the ship and the Captain had no wish to answer any questions about the Equinox or her activities. With their passengers aboard they made course for the Islands of the Faen. The injured were tended as best they could, but one was dying, a deep wound to his stomach bleeding the life from him. There was nothing that could be done and as they made their way westwards Rendell turned his attention to the needs of his ship. He left one of the crew to tend to the badly injured crewman and waited for the inevitable news that he had died.

As with Obernoth it did not come. The rising of a new day found the man recovering and rumours circulating the ship of strange lights in the night, and of a thick blue mist that had lingered for a short time in the galleyways below. Fate had been kind to them and Rendell put it down as a mystery that would remain unsolved. That was until I had come aboard and had seen the same unusual qualities in the northerner. Suspicions resurfaced and with the benefit of hindsight the Captain began to rethink what the man's past might have had to do with the attack upon his ship. Of one thing he was sure. The assassins fought as disciplined warriors and only said one word as they moved through the decks searching out the crew. That word was "Shalen'gael". He knew not what it meant, but it was said with such vehemence that it could have been either a name or a curse. For the Captain it was just another part of a wider mystery, one that he had come to believe needed to be uncovered before our voyage ended.

I listened intently to the Captain's story and then asked why he had come to me. In his straightforward manner he asked that I keep Stump close, watching all that he did, with the purpose of determining if the man was a threat to the Equinox or the safety of the Fleet. He said bluntly that he would be assigning the crewman to me as my assistant, to learn what I knew of healing and to assist me when I

next went ashore. I agreed and the Captain left. It would seem that from first bell tomorrow Stump is to be my assistant, whether I need one or not.

The day grows long and soon the night watch will take their posts. Orders have been issued and I will once again be spending the morrow searching the ruins of Corin'kraag for survivors. As of yet we have found nothing of the townspeople. No bodies nor sign of their leaving can be seen anywhere and as the crews of these three ships labour at collecting supplies only a few of us are to continue the search. Nobody has asked the question yet as to what we should do if we do find anyone alive. It is in my thoughts that our Captain does not expect it. At this stage of our search I do not expect it either.



Day Twenty-five

Our third day in harbour has found me awakened early and on my way to the ruins of Corin'kraag. From my seat at the bow of our skiff I can see the quiet movement of men on the beachhead, and in the gloom the rubble mounds of the town stand as ghostly grey undulations within which the flickering lights of torches appear and disappear. We have seen no sign of the Enemy and it has been resolved that we shall continue our gathering of supplies only as long as this remains so. It is unknown to me why we have not been noticed by the destroyers of this port-haven, but we are going to make as much of the opportunity as we can.

I have been joined by Stump and two other men, a jovial sailmaker called Harlen and a disreputable-looking deckhand by the name of Feth. All four of us have the same orders, search the town for any sign of the Haarn, living or dead. It has been said that by the end of this day our search for survivors will end. Most of the town has been thoroughly picked through and there now remains only a small section to be surveyed. Hopefully we can be back aboard ship by noon.

For the morning's work I chose to search with Harlen. Whilst Stump and Feth worked their way into the centre of the rubble that was once the main town square and its surrounding buildings, the two of us began a steady turning of the wreckage at the square's western edge. There was not much left to find. Because of the unstable nature of the rubble piles, we looked not for obvious signs of a cellar or other subterranean space, but for depressions in the ground where a cellar door or stairway might have given way. When one was found we would dig into its centre hopeful to find the solid edges of a door's seating or perhaps a stone-lined corridor.

For most of the morning this was our task, scouring the piles for sign of subsidence and then digging until we hit something. By the last hour before noon myself and Harlen had covered all the edges of the Square. We had found nothing worth the delving, and sure in the knowledge that there was little left to find I made my way into the town centre to meet with Stump and Feth. Harlen followed a short distance behind. He had fallen back, seemingly in no hurry to conclude his day upon dry land. It was alone then that I happened upon the other two crew members and what I saw stopped me in my tracks.

I must confess that for a moment I did not understand what I was seeing. When my wits returned to me I crouched quietly at the edge of a rubble-heap and watched as a strange tableau played itself out before me. Within the piles of debris Stump was engaged in a ritual of some type, and it was something he evidently did not want others to see. Beside him Feth stood motionless, somehow held rigid, his eyes closed and his hands clenched tightly at his side. Stump however was squatting on his haunches, both hands firmly planted on the ground at his feet, and in the quiet breeze I could hear him chanting. It was a soft whisper that lingered in the air, infusing the ground about his hands with an energy that spread slowly into the stone piles at his left. In the bright light of day it shimmered blue as it wound its way into the debris, before sweeping away the stone and splintered wood as a wind might blow leaves from the ground. What it uncovered was a pair of solid wooden doors, set flat against a rectangle of flooring stones. It was an entryway to a basement area that would have gone unnoticed if not for the strange power wielded by the northerner.

I decided then that I would not let Stump believe he had been discovered. Carefully I retreated to a reasonable distance and then began calling for Harlen. Together we strode into the remains of the square to find both Stump and Feth moving smashed stone from the newly discovered entryway. I could see no sign that Feth had any recollection of his short entrapment. Stump was very excited though. He believed that the doors where the entry to a sub-basement of the town's only library.

Together we moved the final pieces of stone and then smashed a mechanism which bound the doors tightly locked. I watched Stump as he gained a purchase on one door's handle and then pulled with all his might. It came open with difficulty and it took all four of us to wrench it away from its twisted seating but eventually we had it ajar. Only Harlen had brought a torch with him and in the brightness of the day the opening to whatever lay below was wrapped in a black gloom. None of us moved to enter. There was something about this dark opening into the ground that begged caution.

I recount what happened next with a joy that is hard to record with quill and ink. Stump went first, I followed as Harlen and Feth waited above. The entryway proved to be the threshold of a long stairway that angled deep into the ground before finding an end at a small landing. At this landing stood a wide, arched doorway and it was here that Stump paused. Carefully he placed with hand upon the door's thick timber and knocked. There was no response. Again he knocked and then said something in a language I have not heard before. To my astonishment there was a reply, a voice both weak and frightened rose out of the silence, responding to the northerner's words. It was the voice of a child.

Immediately Stump went to work at the hinges of the door. The devastation above had moved the foundations of the entry's wide arch and jammed it closed. With his knife Stump unscrewed the fittings that held the door secure to its hinges. With both removed he called for whoever stood behind to step away from the door and then we both pushed with all our might. In a crash the door fell inwards, spewing gouts of dust and broken rock into the air. Amongst the roiling dust I held my breath as a small head appeared from the darkness, squinting at the brightness of my torch. This child was

followed by another, and then a third. Within moments it was a steady flood of dark-haired children, all covered in dust and hoarse with thirst. In a whisper Stump told each that they were safe and to go to the top of the stair. I looked at the northerner and I could see in his eyes that he had expended more than just his physical strength to find these children. At that moment I decided that for the time being his secret would be my secret as well.

When all the children had found their way to the top of the stairs I spent time searching for stragglers and examining the contents of the basement. It had indeed been the storage area for a significant library. Long rows of books and scrolls lay upon dusty shelves, only jumbled bedding and discarded clothing belying the ordered nature of the catalogued documents. Only when I was satisfied that we had left no-one behind did I ascend back to the ruins above.

In the glare of the afternoon suns I found Stump organising his charges into family groups. Feth had been sent back to the beach-head to summon help and Harlen was off finding water. Against the tall northerner the Haarn children were diminutive. Most looked very young, all between the ages of three and nine years. Every one of the children had dried blood smeared about their ears and they stood in small groups, shivering in the cold winds that had begun to blow in from the east. Stump came to me and gave me the count. We had found one-hundred and seventeen children entombed below and most were deaf, although a few had recovered from whatever had damaged their ears. These were the only survivors of Corin'kraag and Stump had found them all.

Day Twenty-six

The discovery of so many Haarn children has presented a new set of priorities for the captains of our three vessels. The Fleet has not arrived and we find ourselves custodians to the only survivors we have found in this port-haven. When the news reached the beach that we had found survivors, it was only a short time before crew from all three ships arrived with blankets and food. Carefully all the Haarn were removed to the beach and then transported to the Allahard. It is the only ship with enough room to provide accommodation for so

many. My friend Ahlek Norahm has been given the responsibility of their care as they recover from the ordeal of their entombment. Myself and Stump now spend most of our time aboard the Allahard as well, helping with the tending of their injuries and providing translation of their words. Aboard our flotilla there is only one man who can speak Druse, the language of the southern Haarn, and that is Stump. In the matter of the northerner's uncanny ability with language I believe Captain Rendell is completely correct.

From the children we have been able to ascertain what happened at Corin'kraag, at least up until the time that the children were taken into their deep shelter. Stump has been instrumental in collecting this information and I have spent some time with him putting together the pieces of the story that can be garnered from the older children. I must admit that their accounts raise far more questions than they answer.

For some weeks the people of Corin'kraag had known of the steady advance of the Enemy. Most of the Haarn forces had been destroyed in the early days of the encroachment of the shadow at their borders, and in desperation plans had been made by the town Elders to evacuate as many of the townspeople onto ships as they could. The purpose of the evacuation being to find sanctuary upon the open sea until the Enemy had gone and then, when it was safe, return to their homes. Little did any of the town's leaders realise the swiftness of their foe's advance, or the devastation that would be visited upon them.

Corin'kraag was a trading port and a base for a fleet of fishing vessels that trawled the most southern reaches of the Grey Sea. The townsfolk did not maintain the same aversion to deep waters that my people of the Free Nations harboured, and plans for evacuation were well in place when the first creatures of the Enemy appeared out of the sky. Great flying beasts swooped upon the unsuspecting Haarn and spread fear through the town. Quickly all the children of Corin'kraag were herded into the basement of the town's library as their parents made preparation to defend the port and its ships from these aerial attackers. The last thing any of the children saw was the thick doors of the library's storerooms being shut. Within minutes of their hiding a great sound tore the air, sending up clouds of dust and

piercing their ears with pain so agonising that it sent most into unconsciousness. From that time until their discovery they have known nothing but darkness and fear, and because of this we have been unable to determine how long they were below ground, though Captain Rendell believes it could have been as long as ten days. They are all lucky to be alive.

We have all taken on the responsibility of caring for these children until the Fleet arrives, and as we go about our work the collection of supplies continues within the town. With the agreement of the other captains Rendell has sent out scouts into the surrounding lands looking for any other Haarn settlements that may lay close to Corin'kraag, and trying to determine how close the Enemy may still be. So far there has been no sign of life anywhere. The devastation visited upon Corin'kraag has been repeated wherever the scouts have searched.

By the evening of this day we have filled all the ships with supplies. There is no more room available to stow anything and the decks are crammed with goods. All the ships sit low in the water and at this time we are moving cautiously beyond the reach of the port's seawalls so that we have a better view to the north. If the Fleet is to come it must be within the next few days, otherwise we will have no choice but to make our own decisions as to our future. We all go about our duties with eyes fixed firmly on the north, and busy ourselves with tasks that might speed the progress of the days. My time is currently divided between the care of the children aboard the Allahard and the injured crewmen that need tending on the Equinox. It will be good to see the Healer Faren again. Hopefully it will not be long.

Day Twenty-seven

This twenty-seventh day of our journey finds us becalmed upon the sea, anchored only a short distance from the sea-walls of Corin'kraag. Our holds are full and the survivors of the devastation of the town are being cared for. There is little that we can do except wait, hoping the masts of the Fleet will appear to our north and we can continue on with our voyage. On this day I have little to record. My patients are all doing well and only one small skiff has ventured back into the

port. Aboard was Stump and three other crew, making for the library that had protected the children of the Haarn. The Captains have determined that these children should not be denied whatever part of their heritage that can be salvaged, and has sent the party ashore to bring every book and document that can be retrieved back to the flotilla. By mid-afternoon they had returned, the skiff loaded with books, another in tow weighed down with scrolls and parchments. It has occurred to me that most of the children are too young to have learned the skill of reading. Of all those aboard our ships it is possible that only Stump can read them. He does seem very pleased with himself.



Day Twenty-eight

Early this morning we saw the first sign of the Enemy. Upon the hills to the east of Corin'kraag a dark shape came to rest, great wings flourishing in the gloom as it settled. With the suns of dawn only glimmering a red wash against the eastern horizon it was difficult to discern what it might be, however the crew did not wait to find out. Up until this time it had been my belief that the Dromannion stood as the only armed vessel in the Fleet. The flagship carries twelve large ballista devices, firing explosive bolts for distances of up to a kilometre. It has surprised me greatly to find that the Equinox is armed to the teeth as well. With the great beast somewhere within the gloom ahead Captain Rendell fired off orders of his own and the crew jumped to obey. From secret compartments in the quarterdeck came six crossbow-like devices, heavy enough that they needed to be carried by four men, each fixed into free swinging mounts at the ship's sides and stern. With all six weapons in place each was attended by a well-trained firing team that set the weapons, winched back their bows and then loaded explosive bolts that sat quietly, waiting for their short flight to destruction.

Captain Rendell did not wait for the creature to attack. As the weapons were put in place the remainder of the crew swung the Equinox out into deeper water. Both the Allahard and the Kalborea

followed westwards, and in the semi-dark of the dawn all three ships unloaded their secret weaponry upon the ruins of Corin'kraag.

The great flying creature was somewhere upon the hills at the eastern edge of the port and the bolts from the three ships landed squarely amidst the ruins. Through the gloom the bombardment continued, sputtering fuses on each of the bolts tracing long arcs of light from the ships to the shoreline. In a series of explosions the rubble erupted, blasts lighting the ground with plumes of fire and pulverised stone. As the bolts fell, the fire teams adjusted their aim, throwing their projectiles further into the ruin, marching the explosions in a line towards the far edge of the town. In a hail of fire the port lit up and out of the smoke rose the beast into the air, screaming its anger as it launched itself upwards. It was only then that the shapes of four more of the creatures rose from the ruins. For Captain Rendell that was enough.

Orders rang out once again and those ballistas that were able trained their bolts on the beasts, firing their explosive rounds into their number as our ships tacked out into the Grey Sea. In a flurry of detonations we turned our backs for the last time on the lands of the Haarn. We have outlived our welcome here, this world is no longer ours.

For most of the morning we have sailed out into deeper waters. We are all aware that by moving further westwards we may pass the Fleet and never rendezvous, but the Enemy is too close and the winged creatures are only precursors to something far more destructive. Thankfully we have seen no further sign of the Enemy, no pursuit or attack has followed our departure. If we have seen no sign by noon the Captain says we will drop anchor and consider what we should do next.

At midday the three ships of our small flotilla came to a halt, furling sail and dropping anchors. The wind is brisk but the sea remains calm and in this setting the captains have come together to discuss what we should do. There is no sign of the Fleet and no way that we can risk returning to Corin'kraag. Such circumstances have left us with little in the way of long term options. When the meeting was over word spread quickly through the Equinox that a decision had been

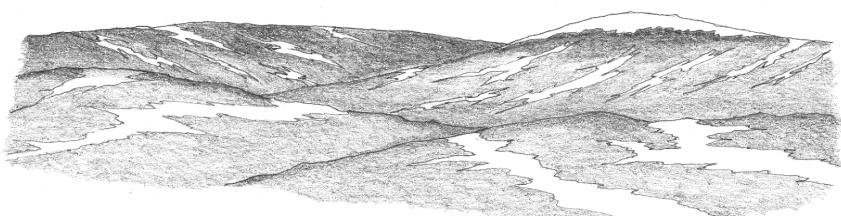
made. For the moment we are to do nothing but remain at anchor and wait.

Day Thirty

Two further days have passed as we wait at anchor and there has been no sign of the Fleet. All three ships remain close, the sea a flat vista of motionless water enshrouded now in mist. We all wait, the Equinox silent in the water as all hands look out into the fog, ears straining for any sound that might indicate the approach of another vessel. Hope is starting to falter and I find myself thinking now on what we must do if we never find the Fleet. Questions fill every crewman's thoughts. Where are we to go? How can we build new lives when our world is no more than these three small ships and the cold water beneath us? In the mists we sit without purpose and wait, our minds in ferment, our hopes fading.

Day Thirty-two

Fighting has started to break out on the lower decks. Sailors lay listlessly in their hammocks, feeling the languid swell of the sea and finding no reason to take to their duties. Frustration and anger are building in the eyes of many, I can see that they are afraid and need someone to blame for their predicament. Arguments have turned into conflict and four men have found their way to my surgery with bruising and concussions caused by brawls. All the hope of our stay in Corin'kraag, the finding of supplies and the rescue of the Haarn children has evaporated as we languish in this cold sea. It would be better if there were a breeze. At least then we would have the option of making sail.



Day Thirty-three

This morning the winds returned, blowing the mists southwards and fanning our hopes of finding the Fleet. The Captain of the Kalborea, a man by the name of Artimus Lovar, has put forward an idea to increase our chances of meeting up with the Fleet, and today it is to be put into practice. Word of a plan, any plan, has been met with high spirits from the crews of our three ships. With the mists gone, all three ships are to spread out, staying at the farthest distance apart whilst still remaining visible. We are to sail now to the north-west and as we go fire off the flotilla's supply of explosive bolts, high into the air above us. It has been determined that one shot per ship every fifteen minutes will be sufficient. With luck the Fleet has spread out searching for their lost ships and these explosive flares will be seen. It is now our only hope.

At noon the barrage began and in accordance with the plan each ship has sent up a bolt. All bolts are being fired to the north and each explodes high above us with a deafening blast. I feel sure these detonations must be both seen and heard over a wide area. The Allahard sits two leagues to the north, the Kalborea a similar distance to the south, and the Equinox plies its way at their centre into a rising swell. I find the air here very cold. Although the winds blow from the north-east there is a chill in their bluster that cuts through my clothing and has begun to freeze water upon the decks and rigging. We have travelled a great distance south in our flight from the Enemy, and it is good now that we have begun to track northwards. I have no experience with ailments of the cold and it is my hope that we will find warmer waters soon.

Nightfall has brought no joy to our endeavour. The explosions continue and in the gathering dark the captains have changed strategy. Now we fire flares high into the air overhead, bright cascades of burning powder raining down on the sea as we try to attract attention to ourselves. It is a wondrous sight as the flares rise into the air before erupting into blasts of sparkling light. Such things I have not witnessed before and I have spent some time watching as they arch overhead. Harlen tells me that they have refined the bolts for this purpose, packing their explosive heads with phosphorous and

metal shavings. He seems well pleased with the results. In the dark of a moonless evening the cascades of light seem ethereal, each of the ships silhouetted in small showers of fire as explosions erupt above them. Only Providence can know if it will be enough.

Day Thirty-four

Providence has smiled kindly upon us for we have been found. At the first hour of morning masts appeared on the horizon to the north. Two small scout vessels, the Penumbra and the Allanteel saw our flares in the night and have made contact with the Allahard. In all my days I will not forget the relief that I now feel at our discovery. It is only time, and favourable winds, that keep us from the rest of the Fleet. From what I have been able to gather the Fleet has not had an easy time of it either, their troubles starting soon after our departure.

Whilst we were moving closer to the coast of the Haarn, the Fleet sailed farther into open waters. For two days they waited before beginning to track southwards, Captain Duschet's intention to take the Dromannion, and the rest of the Fleet, to the pre-arranged rendezvous point to await our arrival. On that third night the Fleet was hit by a huge storm that scattered all of its vessels over a wide area. One ship was lost and over fifty souls could not be saved as it succumbed to the tempest. For four days the Dromannion scoured the sea, shepherding its lost flock and taking account of the losses sustained by many of their number. By the time the Fleet could once again move it was too late, the rendezvous had been missed, and they had been driven so far out to sea that it had taken nine days to make the port of Corin'kraag.

What they found at Corin'kraag left them without doubt as to the outcome of our mission to the Haarn, the sight of dozens of winged creatures enough to know that our three ships could not have remained there. Duschet was not going to leave us to an unknown fate however. Quickly he devised a plan to search to the north and west, and thankfully our flares were spotted. Now we need only follow the Penumbra and the Allanteel back to the main body of the Fleet and we will be reunited. I look forward to seeing the Dromannion once again.

Day Thirty-seven

Although there were times when I did not believe I would once again stand upon the deck of the Dromannion it has indeed come to pass. On this thirty-seventh day of our journey our reunion with the Fleet is now complete. At mid-morning we intersected the path of the flagship and to the sounds of much commotion were welcomed back. The return of our three ships has made the Fleet whole once more, and now we once again must look to where our future lies. Such decisions must wait for a short time however. The supplies and survivors taken from Corin'kraag need to be distributed through the Fleet, and for reasons that are not yet apparent I have been called to a meeting with Captain Duschet. The unloading of supplies and the proper accommodation of the Haarn children have been given priority and my meeting with the First Captain must wait until tomorrow.

It is interesting to note that the Haarn do not call themselves by that name. To themselves they are known as NomDruse, which roughly translates as "people of the south". I was not aware of it but the Haarn Kingdoms were made up of many different nationalities and tribal groups. These children are the last remaining survivors of their people. I am very glad that we were able to find them.

There are many things that must now be done, and it would seem that life aboard the Dromannion has not stopped whilst I was away. The Healer Faren has a full workload before him and the injured men from the Equinox, plus a further four from the Allahard and Kalborea, have only added to that burden. After a few heartfelt greetings both myself and Ahlek Norahm have been put straight back to work. For the moment Stump remains aboard the Equinox. Although he has been my assistant on that ship I do not know yet if Captain Rendell wishes his crewman to continue his training under Faren aboard the Dromannion. This is something that should be determined prior to the Fleet getting under way.

In the evening of this day I find myself back upon the foredeck of the Dromannion, taking advantage of the only peace that can be found aboard a ship that becomes more crowded with every passing day. For the moment the Haarn are to be kept aboard so that Faren can

properly investigate their state of health. The evacuees from the Kalborea have been returned to that ship. Their illness has proven to be nothing more than a short-lived affliction picked up by one of their number. Thankfully there has been no recurrence of it amongst the remainder of the Fleet, and as all now seem fit they have been transported back to their own accommodations.

The sky has now fallen into night and a stiff breeze pulls at the furled sails as they rest at their yards. The morning should see a final decision made on our future, and the only thing that is certain is that the world we have known is gone. Reports I have heard from those ships that got close enough to Corin'kraag have told a story of dozens of winged beasts circling the town and of great commotion within its ruins. We must have stirred up a hornet's nest with our bombardment of the port, and in doing so brought the eye of the Enemy firmly upon our sojourn there. I am glad that we were able to strike at least one blow before we left our lands behind. It is something that we can no longer dwell upon however. For now there is only the future extending before us, the past has been swept away.

Day Thirty-eight

The Healer Faren came and awakened myself and the other assistants in the early hours of the morning. He had been approached by the ship's Second Officer and wished all the Healers attend the meeting of the Fleet's officers. It is not to be a small affair. In the pre-dawn hours the quarterdeck of the flagship had been cleared and out of the veils of night skiffs from all the ships in the fleet have begun bringing their Officers aboard. The future of all our number is to be decided once and for all.

Mid-morning saw myself and my colleagues standing on the outside of a wide congregation of staff from all the vessels of the Fleet. Captain Duschet stood at the centre of the quarterdeck and soon brought the meeting to order. To start the discussion he gave a quick accounting of the state of the Fleet, its number and a revised count of the souls aboard. Time was spent remembering the loss of those who had succumbed to the dangers of the sea before the meeting opened to ideas about what must now be done.

Agreement was reached quickly that there now lay no haven upon the lands of Adoracia or the Haarn. The old world was no longer a safe place for men, and with that fact fully understood the only question that remained was where we should now go. To answer this the three captains of the Equinox, Allahard and Kalborea stepped forward. With loud voice they described the migration of the birds to the west, and put forward the logical conclusion that they were flying to a haven somewhere beyond the western horizon. Even if, they argued, it was only a small island or group of islands, it might provide us with the sanctuary we need to rebuild our strength before finding more open and habitable lands.

With few options available the captains of the Fleet discussed the viability of such an expedition and then agreed that it was our only hope. In the warmth of the morning suns the decision was made. The remnants of the Free Nations would leave the lands of their ancestors behind and search out a new home in the west. If it was good enough for the birds it might prove good enough for us.

With the ending of the meeting work began immediately. The Fleet is to break into two groups, at the head will be arrayed a flotilla of smaller ships to act as scouts, spread out to cover as much of the sea ahead as possible. Larger ships such as the Dromannion will remain at their rear, following their lead as the smaller ships navigate the way ahead. The open sea is unknown to all and it seems prudent that we move carefully.

At midday I was summoned to the Captain's quarters. Although I was not surprised to see Captain Rendell waiting there, the Healer Faren stood also in attendance, and this gave me cause to wonder why I might be required. My first thought being that I was to be transferred permanently to the Equinox, but this was soon dispelled as the reason.

It was Rendell who put my mind at rest. In his usual abrupt manner he informed me that he had told everything to Captain Duschet of his concerns regarding his crewman Stump, and that I had been watching him over the course of our scouting mission to the Haarn. There were concerns that the northerner may be a threat to the safety of the Fleet, and the Captains wanted my opinion as to whether he was, and if that was the case, how he should be handled.

My experiences with the man at Corin'kraag would not allow me to be completely open about what I had seen. He had saved one crewman from certain death and found all the survivors that had been pulled from the ruins of the port. I had decided then that such acts of compassion had earned him my silence, and although it grieves me to say it, I was less than forthcoming about his powers and abilities. In the absence of the whole truth I told the captains that Stump was an educated man who was definitely hiding something in his past. He had however, done nothing to harm the Equinox whilst on this voyage and had proven himself an able assistant to the care of the injured aboard that ship. Although I felt it bold at the time I also put forward the idea that he should be transferred to the Dromannion, and be trained properly under the eye of Faren. Whatever his indiscretions in the past he could prove another useful Assistant to the Healer.

As I write this I realise that I probably should have told all I knew of the northerner. There is a power in the man however, that I believe needs to be left alone. In truth I can sense no malice or malcontent within him. For the time being his secret will be mine as well.

By the early evening of this day the Fleet is ready to begin the next stage of our great expedition. Ten small ships including the Equinox stand at the vanguard, spread upon the sea as far as the horizon extends to the west. Aboard the Dromannion and the other vessels of our number, we wait only for the flare that will start our journey into the unknown. In the cold bluster of a southerly wind the twin moons of Elanna and Shabel rise behind us. In their ascending glow the flare is shot into the darkening sky. We are on our way.

Day Forty-three

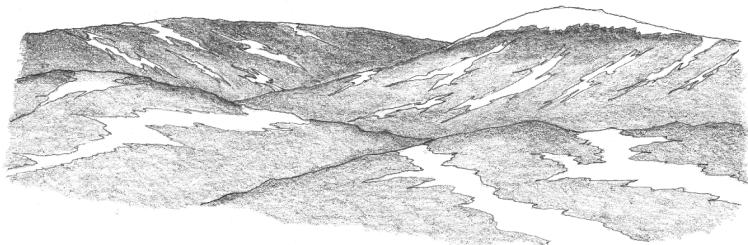
Five days have now passed since we turned into the west. And now that the way forward has been decided a new energy has infused the Fleet, our ships riding steadily into the unknown reaches of the Grey Sea. Life for the crew and evacuees of the Dromannion has settled into a routine, one of constant work that keeps all hands busy, and allows the souls aboard to focus on what is immediately important, rather than worry about what may lay ahead.

For my part I have been deep in study, the craft of Healing a vocation requiring both knowledge and skill. The Healer Faren is a storehouse of both, a deep well of information and wisdom that myself, and the other Assistants, must make constant referral too. My days are spent in tending the sick and injured, working alongside my fellow trainees as we try and make sense of the bewildering range of ailments and afflictions that seem to emerge amongst the passengers of this vessel. No day sees the same patients yet each day follows the same solid routine. The morning is spent in the Surgery, tending those who come for help, the afternoon spent searching out those who do not wish the attention. For the Healer Faren this is the most important task of the day. It is his contention that we must find everyone who is sick, whether they wish help or not, for it will take only one serious illness to put the entire Fleet at risk. Thus we spend much time below decks, surveying every room and hold, looking for those who harbour a harsh cough, or concealed rash. Anything that might connote infection is dealt with immediately, and as long as our medicines hold out so it will be.

There is time for other activities however. Every soul aboard has been given a job to do, a specific duty that it that person's alone. Whilst the crew may sail the ship and tend to its many needs, the evacuees have been given the task of looking after themselves. Cooking, cleaning, production of clothing, entertainment, hygiene duties and schooling have all been taken up eagerly, and within the narrow world that is this ship we have begun to operate very much like a small town, with village meetings, entertainment and disputes all part of the ongoing calendar of life. Very quickly we are recognising each other, our names and duties aboard. The bustle and activity of the ship provides a focus that does not allow us to think about what the future may bring. It is easy enough however, to glance out over the disquiet sea and be reminded that the dozens of ships that forge westwards with us are only small islands of humanity in a wider world that seems ambivalent to our progress.

Since turning westwards the weather has remained favourable. Out of the north-east blows a consistent stream of air, pushing our ships deep into the Grey Sea. Cloud banks have come and gone and we have been visited only with light rain and morning mists. With the wind at our back we forge ahead, the horizon a clear line dividing sea

and sky, broken only by our scout vessels as they lead the way. It is easy as I sit upon the foredeck to believe that we are the only living things in this universe. I wonder how long it will be before we see land.



Day Forty-four

Today Stump joined the Healer's Assistants for the first time. The Captain has chosen another five persons to train with Faren, and the northerner has been included as a part of this new group. Since finding the Haarn children, who insist on being called NomDruse, Stump has been by their side, acting as interpreter and standing as Guardian to their needs and well-being. In this task he has been joined by more than a dozen helpers, both men and women, all having taken up the challenge of teaching the children the Common Anglisch, the language of the Free Nations, and ensuring their daily needs are met. So far the children have stood apart, unwilling to show any sign of interaction or interest in the activities aboard ship. It is my belief that only time will heal the unseen wounds that have marked them.

In a deliberate attempt to keep a close watch upon Stump he has been paired with myself in our training. Faren has not come to see me regarding this. I believe the act of placing him as my partner in our internship has spoken clearly enough. I cannot say that I have any misgivings, the man grows into more of a mystery the more I get to know him, but there is something about him that is both compelling and dangerous. He holds a great power within, yet appears to all as almost invisible, wielding a practised skill to be a part of a group and in that gathering go unnoticed. I swear there are times in the day when I have to remind myself that he is actually beside me as we work.

The afternoon of this day has seen me and a number of the Assistants providing a health check to the NomDruse children. They have been given quarters in the second deck below the foredeck, and an entire section has been made available to them. It has been discussed whether they might need to be transferred to one of the smaller and less crowded vessels, but that cannot be done just yet. Until the Fleet comes to a halt for some important purpose there can be no transfer between ships. For the moment we are taking full advantage of the favourable winds and shall stop for nothing. Until such time the NomDruse will have their home aboard the Dromannion.

With the children tended, I have found the remainder of the afternoon available for leisure and have used it to spend some time with Stump. He is a difficult man to converse with, however on the subjects of our craft we have common ground, and for all his apparent knowledge there are many things that are new to him. The ailments and conditions that we have been confronted with provide ample opportunity for discussion, but even with this common interest I have found it impossible to uncover anything but the barest personal facts on the northerner. Perhaps if I did not feel so tired I might have better fortune.

The past week has been busy, the learning given by the Healer Faren exhaustive in its breadth and depth, however I can say that the vocation of Healer has proven a fascinating one. Within the Fleet there are few men as skilled as Faren, and from what I have been able to gather all the Healers have taken on Assistants in an attempt to provide proper care across the Fleet. Many ships have none at all, and it has been made clear to us that upon completion of our training each of us will find a home somewhere in the Fleet where we are needed. It is a fact that we have all come to accept but I hope I will get the chance to remain here aboard the Dromannion. For me it has become home.

Although there is much that needs to be done aboard the Dromannion, and much that remains unknown about our future, I have found one thing that is concrete about the mysterious northerner. He harbours an unusual interest in the library take from Corin'kraag and in particular a set of three books from amongst their number. These he has taken to our quarters and can be found reading from

them at every opportunity he has. I have asked him on what they contain but he has said only that they are written in a language known as Haer'al, and are part of a history that is important to him. For the moment I am content to leave it at that.

Day Forty-seven

Morning has dawned to find the wind now blowing from the south, its bluster veering in the night and leaving the Fleet in the grip of an icy hand. Still we forge westwards, the horizon a clear vista of surging water and the spreading wakes of dozens of vessels. As in the early mornings of previous days I am up with my colleagues, handing out warm clothing and helping with the clearing of ice from the workings of the ship. The southerlies bite deep, the winds a rising gale that churns the waters about us, raising the swell of the waves and sending the Dromannion pitching and rolling in its endless heave. There is no sign of cloud though. The sky remains clear, the dawn of the suns breaking the east with flaring hues of orange and red. I cannot help but notice the looks of anticipation in the eyes of the crew. They feel as I do that something is on the brew, and that it lies beyond the horizon to the south.

This day passes as all others have. The wind increases as we move further west and the cold has taken hold of the ship, freezing water as it pools upon the decks, making even the shortest of journeys hazardous. We spend our time clearing the decking and tending to our normal duties, but there is something out of place in the cold that assaults us. It is known that huge ice-packs lay far to the south, but they stand at such a distance that they could not generate such chill. Somehow the wind has the feeling of icy claws drawing their way along the ship, grasping at it and smothering it slowly in a cold that paralyses anyone who ventures above deck.

At last light flags have been raised to signal the rest of the Fleet. Captain Duschet has decided to turn to the north-west and put distance between ourselves and whatever is generating the cold bluster. By dusk the entire Fleet had changed course. Hopefully we can outrun these unknown forces and tear ourselves away from this all-embracing chill.

Day Forty-nine

Today I was awakened to the sounds of commotion outside our rooms. Stump and Ahlek Norahm were first to the door, myself and the others of our quarters following behind as we became a part of a steady stream of men and women making for the weather-decks. Something was happening above and of sufficient interest that the decks below were emptying quickly. Within the throng I moved carefully, making the stairs to the upper deck and thence into a milling crowd of pointing fingers and upturned heads.

In the early morning light I could not at first see what it was that my compatriots were looking at. The sky above was a deep blue, only the wisps of high cloud tinged with orange marring its pristine field. The wind was steady but not the powerful bluster of the last days. It was still cold and in the spreading light it took me a moment to see what the commotion was indeed all about. Against the dark shadows of the ship I was amazed to find that the rigging was on fire.

There was something wrong though. Quickly I looked left and right searching for any sign of the crew. All were standing fast, watching the display, making no attempt to douse the flames or cut down the burning ratlines. It was only then that I looked closer and could see that the rigging, and indeed the sails themselves, were not burning. Above me danced a conflagration of blue-white flame, that jumped between the ratlines and run up the stays to the yards, before dissipating into the air above. It was like flame but not; too fast to be burning, yet as volatile and energetic as any fire I had ever seen. The air was charged with a powerful energy and I could smell with each breath that same smell one might find with the approach of a thunderstorm. I have never seen anything like it.

For a few minutes longer the strange display danced amongst the rigging above us before fading into the morning brightness. I was entranced by it, the sheer power and speed of its flickering energy coursing up the rigging lines before expanding out into the air above the masts. Of all the people watching though only one was smiling. For us all it was an awesome spectacle that had us staring into the air, trying to fathom the nature of what we were seeing. For Stump

though it was as if he was welcoming an old friend, and he seemed unaware as to how different his response was from the rest of us. He knew something about the strange phenomena and I was determined to find out what that was.

While the crowd remained thick upon the deck I pushed my way to Stump's side and asked him directly what the flickering lights were. To my surprise he told me without hesitation. To the peoples of the North they were known as the Fires of Ayari, a potent symbol of the power of the wind gods to change the destiny of men. For his people such displays were always a good omen, a sign that something positive was about to impact on lives overwhelmed by desperation and hardship. He said that we were about to have good fortune visited upon us all. I can only say that I hope he is right.

The display of the Fires of Ayari have been the talk of the ship for the remainder of the day. And in those discussions I have heard a witches brew of superstition and fact melding together to confuse and misinform, until no one was sure what they might have seen, or give good reason for its appearance. I kept what the northerner had said to me close though. If indeed we are to be visited with good fortune it will be appreciated all the more if it is not expected.

Day Fifty

Life aboard ship continues to a rhythm that we are all settling to. The work of the Healers is proving diverse and interesting, and amongst the peoples of the Dromannion even the Assistants are being met with respect and deference. It is a curious thing. I have been a Potter most of my adult life, respected for the goods that I have worked with my hands, and in that profession have held a social status of trust because of my membership of the Faeyen Guilds. People now treat me far differently. Although I never thought about it before, I can see now that healing is a personal thing. The trust my patients place in myself and the other Assistants brings with it a respect that knits you closely to them. Their pain becomes yours to ease, and the more I tend to their needs the greater the satisfaction that I gain from my endeavours. If this voyage lasts long enough I am sure I shall become a Healer in my own right. And if this is so I am not so certain now

that I would return to my old craft. For myself I cannot help but wonder if it is the less than subtle hand of Fate that is now shaping our individual destinies.

*D*ay Fifty-one

Last night a vision came to me in my dreams. From somewhere deep within my slumber I found myself alone aboard the Dromannion and witness to events which haunt me even as I write these words. I sit quietly now upon the foredeck, watching the suns set on another day and I am wondering what might lie in wait for me in the night hours to come. The vision is a message, of this I am sure, but it gives me no solace or certainty for I cannot fathom the meaning of it. All I can say is that it has left me wondering if our journey westwards will prove to be our salvation, or our undoing.

I went to my quarters at a late hour. I had spent time talking with the Healer Faren, discussing a peculiar case I had discovered amongst the NomDruse. One of the boys has an unusual rash spreading across his arms and legs and appeared to be bleeding from the gums. Although it sounds serious, the nature of the rash was only mild, the bleeding only noticeable when he would wipe his mouth with his forearm. It was something however, that needed to be reported to the Healer and I brought him to the children's quarters for the purpose of an examination. Stump came with us, he is still the only person aboard who speaks the childrens' native language, and time was spent finding out all that could be unearthed about the boy's history and symptoms. His name is Meriarrum and in the gloom of the quarters we were able to discover enough for the Healer to ascertain the boy's problem. It was a blood disease, only in its early stages, but something that would require treatment. It was not infectious, however it would take time to overcome.

I spoke with Faren for some time before returning with Stump to our rooms. He seemed deep in thought and talked only infrequently as we walked the galleyways to our quarters. He would give no comment on the nature of the boy's illness except to say that many afflictions looked similar, and that perhaps Meriarrum would surprise us all. I left the northerner to his books and opened my hammock. It was then that sleep overtook me.

In the quiet of my dreams I found myself alone, a solitary soul on an empty Dromannion sliding silently through a sea as flat as a tabletop. Above the two moons shone brightly, a harsh light from on high that etched the ship with hard shadows, throwing latticeworks of light and shade across the decks ahead of me. There was no wind but the ship ploughed forward, on a set course that could not be altered. As is the strangeness of dreams it did not occur to me that my situation was unusual. I was not the master of my own destiny, so why should I not be a captive passenger on a ship that would go where it wished. In this dream I was a spectator and somehow I understood that. I stood my ground and waited.

Out of the gloom ahead came a spire of stone that rose from the languid waters and speared up into the sky above. It was an immovable tower of granite that was soon followed by another and then a third; vast pillars of rock that gave only enough width between them to allow a bare passage of the ship. And yet through this forest of spires the Dromannion slipped easily, taking a straight line that led the vessel into a wide ring of towering stones. Here the ship came to a stop. All about the spires stood mute, but that was not the end of my dream.

From high above came a shriek, a sound that sent chills of terror down my spine. I looked up and saw the heights of each spire surmounted by one of the flying reptiles that had hastened us from Corin'kraag, and behind each lay a dark malevolence that looked down at the Dromannion with a hatred that I could feel burning into my skin. Only on one of the spires did no creature reside. Instead upon its cragged summit stood a man cloaked in the deepest blue, and from his form crackled an arcing tangle of energy that kept the reptiles at bay and forced the brooding evil to hold its creatures in check. But only for a moment. Out of the sky came great blasts of lightning, crashing into the pillars, smashing them as the bolts exploded against their sides, sending them falling into the tranquil waters. When I looked up the way ahead had been cleared and the Dromannion once again started forward, but this time there was no easy passage.

From out of the darkness rose a violent gale that churned the sea, great waves thrashing against the remaining spires as the ship tried to

make the only way out. It did not succeed. In a cacophony of smashing timbers the ship drove headlong into one of the broken spires, splintering its bow in a violent upheaval, dropping masts and rigging as the relentless force of the waves pounded the mighty ship into the spire's immovable flank. With a rending cry the ship succumbed and began to sink. It was then that I awoke to the sounds of the ship at night, relieved in my realisation that it had been a dream and not a disaster. Above the snoring, and the creaking of the Dromannion's timbers, I could hear only the turning of parchment as Stump studied his books. I did not sleep again that night.



Day Fifty-four

The dream has haunted me for the past three days, but I cannot let it gain an importance it may not deserve. There is much to be done and our duties do not get any lighter. The provision of fresh water is now becoming a problem, one that only rain can solve, and we have been without a good downpour for more than a week. We have all been placed on reduced rations until suitable rain refills the water stores.

It is on this day that I can report an interesting turn of events regarding the routine of our ship. All of us have our duties, but the constant work of the day does not forestall the eruption of quarrelling amongst our number. Such disturbances have become commonplace and although they have not yet affected the running of the ship, it is only a matter of time before a serious dispute will polarise the evacuees and cause great discord amongst us. To ensure that trivial disputes do not grow into events that can cause disharmony the Captain has ordered the establishment of the position of Administrator. Such a position is to be held by the ship's Second Officer and all matters pertaining to rations, quartering and personal affront are to be directed to him. On all questions of arbitration he will have the last word, and with the full authority of the Captain can dispense whatever remedy is required to settle disputes. I believe it is a good idea. Whether it works will be something only the future can unveil.

Day Fifty-five

As of yet we have seen no rain, the skies remain clear, only wisps of cloud break what is a perfect vault of blue above. The Water-Master has reported to the Captain that we have less than a week's supply at our current usage but there is little we can do. Rations are as low as it is safe to take them and unless rain comes we will find ourselves in dire need. We all look to the horizon, hoping to see the beginnings of weather but as of yet there has been nothing.

The prospect of running out of water has not reduced the duties that we must perform however. Our routine runs as always and I find little time available for relaxation. Hygiene below decks is becoming an issue. With large numbers of people living in close quarters it is becoming more difficult to maintain clean conditions, and we are starting to see the emergence of many minor complaints associated with the cramped accommodations. For the moment we seem able to tend to these problems, but Faren has warned us that it will take only one serious illness and we may not be able to control what will follow.

It was in the mid-afternoon that I was witness to the highlight of our day. About us the Fleet is ranged in a wide pattern and although there are many ships in our number we manage to keep a safe distance between us. At the second bell past noon a call went up from the watch above and I was lucky enough to be on deck when it came. Off the starboard bow rose a behemoth of the deep, not unlike that which I saw aboard the Equinox but far greater in size. Its ridged back appeared out of the waters between the Dromannion and the Avernell, a huge triangular shaped fin clearing the water and lifting up into the air. I have no doubt that the fin alone was twice the height of the Dromannion's mainmast, and as it slid over on its side it sank back into the impenetrable waters, then resurfaced again before diving back into the depths. For those who had not seen such a creature before the sight of its immense form gave pause to think, and to consider the nature of the beasts that must live beneath us. This Behemoth was larger than any I had previously experienced and it does make me wonder if these creatures will get bigger the further we travel into the west. I do not see them as dangerous, but something that lives on such a vast scale can have no real regard for flotsam as

fragile as our own ships. We could be crushed by it and the Behemoth might not even notice.

Day Fifty-six

There is an old saying amongst the Tendu tribes of eastern Adoracia that a man should be careful of what he wishes for. For the peoples of our Fleet we have certainly got more than we asked. In the early hours of this morning a stormfront moved in from the south, and we have been visited with a day of rain and high winds that have dispersed our ships, and left us fighting to keep the Dromannion in good order. Unlike previous storms this tempest does not have the uncontrolled fury of its predecessors. We are confronted however, with changing winds and a continuous rain that has found its way through the entire ship as a floating mist.

On the decks above the crew struggles with the conditions, the winds turning in all directions, tearing down rigging and throwing furled sails onto the decks below. The Captain has been forced to turn the Dromannion into the winds and it is a constant battle to keep the ship stable in a churning sea. Above all we can feel the cold that has come with this bluster. All hatches have been covered and only the crew remains above. Below decks we must be content with listening to the howl of the winds and placing our trust in the skill of the Captain and his crew.

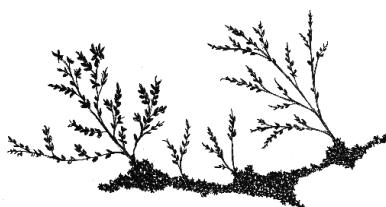
In the midst of this storm I have found that none of our usual work can safely be done. Our duties lay uncompleted, and we spend our time instead huddled in our quarters, listening to the gales and talking amongst ourselves. The cold creeps into our small room like a thief in the night and we have all resorted to throwing on extra clothes to keep warm. Of our number only Stump is absent. He remains with the children, having been called to them earlier in the day. For the rest of us there is little to do. The storm rages on and the only person who might be happy about it will be the WaterMaster. I believe our stores will be replenished quickly.

*D*ay Fifty-seven

The storm continues but the winds have retreated, a deluging rain all that remains of the weather front. For all of this day we have had rain and only the crew have been allowed upon the upper decks. I continue my work as usual but being below decks without sight of sun or sky is proving very disheartening. The cold has abated and everything is damp, the rain finding its way to all decks of the vessel. Providence has given us what we have asked for in an abundance that has drenched us to the bone. There seems to be no end to the downpour and in its all-embracing shroud we can see nothing of the other ships. We can only hope that none have come to harm.

*D*ay Fifty-nine

Finally the rain has ended and we have arisen from below decks to find the Fleet dispersed far to the north and south of our position. Flares have been fired, calling all of the ships together and this morning has been spent taking account of the Fleet. As far as can be seen we have suffered no losses, and in the calm that has followed the rain all the vessels of our number have closed into tight formation. Message flags have been used to speak amongst us and some of the news has proven worrying. Illness has broken out on three ships, the cause and remedy unknown. Luckily each of the vessels has a Healer and they have cautioned against the transfer of any additional help until it can be ascertained what the affliction might be. For the moment the Healers have decided to keep the ships quarantined as we return to our voyage. Water stocks however, have been replenished. On this point at least we will have no need to worry for at least the next twenty-one days.



*D*ay Sixty

At first light this morning warning flares burst high in the air above our scout ships. From the Equinox and the Usul long trails of red flame rose high into the morning air before extinguishing against the morning winds. I was above decks at the time. I have found it a good time to relax before the duties of the day, and with the early watch I saw the flares for myself as they arched away to the north. Captain Duschet was called immediately and the full armament of the Dromannion was brought to readiness. In such things I can play no part. The bolt-crews are well-practised and in a flurry of activity they organised themselves along the port and starboard sides of the decks. In the commotion I went unnoticed and decided to watch everything from the vantage of the quarterdeck balusters.

Whilst the rest of the Fleet waited the Dromannion advanced on the position held by the Equinox. I knew the scout-ship to be fully armed and wondered as we approached as to the nature of the warning. There was no sign of violence or danger, but all the scouts had come together in a tight formation awaiting the arrival of the flagship. It was only as we rode the last kilometre to their position that I saw the first indication of their distress. With my eyes fixed firmly on the ships ahead I did not notice much else until I heard an impact against the hull of the Dromannion. Glancing down I found myself looking into a tide of debris, consisting of pieces of wood, personal possessions and maritime equipment. In the midst of it I also spied a body.

At that same moment the watch cried out from the crowsnest and the Captain and his officers went to the port side of the ship. There I could see their faces change and as I looked down into the waters I began to see more and more detritus flowing past the ship. Bodies and the splintered remains of many vessels lay bobbing in the waves, being dragged by the current to some unknown destination. Duschet called out commands and soon a number of the crew were at work, fishing what they could from the water as the Dromannion ploughed towards the scout ships. Their efforts were rewarded with a gruesome haul, for amongst the detritus were three bodies, and all looked like they had been in the water for at least a few days.

The Captain called for the Healer Faren and right then my detachment from these proceedings ended. With the help of the Healer and a few of my colleagues we arranged the bodies for examination, and on the mid-deck began a detailed search for their cause of death. Faren was able to determine quickly that they had all died of drowning, only one showing sign of an injury. With this information at hand the Dromannion forged ahead, making for the Equinox with all speed. It was only then that I began to see something else, just beyond the line of our ships. And as the light grew brighter it became far clearer. It was a thicket of masts and torn sail, reaching into the air like broken fingers of wood. Ahead of us were the remains of ships, and they were not ours.

Quickly we made the position of the Equinox and pulled alongside. Against the bulk of the Dromannion the Equinox was small by comparison, but what lay ahead of both ships was beyond their capacity to handle alone. In the water lay the sinking remains of at least thirty ships, and across a wide area floated hundreds of survivors, hanging on to whatever debris gave them salvation from the grip of the waves. In amongst the tangle rowed the skiffs of the Equinox and the other scouts, hauling men, women and children to safety. Since first light they had been at it and already the deck of the Equinox lay covered with the limp bodies of a multitude of exhausted souls.

Within that first minute a flare shot high, calling the Fleet forward and in its glare Faren apportioned out the duties for his Assistants. I went with Stump and the Healer onto the deck of the Equinox and we began to determine who needed help most. Everybody who had been pulled from the water was chilled to the bone and many of the children needed immediate attention. It was to be the beginning of a very long day.

Whilst we tended those aboard the Equinox the rest of the Fleet gathered at the edges of the debris. Quickly lifeboats were dropped from their davits and soon the sea was alive with rescuers, searching the debris field and pulling all who still had breath from the cold embrace of the sea. In those few hours more than six hundred people were hauled out of the water, and for the remainder of the day the remnants of their vessels were searched for belongings and goods that

might be useful to the progress of the Fleet. None of the ships that had brought these people to this point lasted the afternoon. All succumbed to the damage that had been wrought upon them, and to the last they sank into the depths. With great pride I can say that all who could be saved were saved. No-one was left behind. We are left now with questions that must be answered, and uppermost in all our minds is who are these people, and how did they get here?

Such questions must wait however. Those that we have saved are spread amongst all the ships of the Fleet and for the moment we can only tend to their distress. There is much about them though that is different. All wear the same grey-coloured clothing, and although it is of a style I have not seen before it appears to be some type of uniform. Curiously even the children wear the same drab coverings and I am sure that they do not originate in Adoracia. Although they seem to be a powerfully built people they are shorter than most men I have known. At their tallest they must stand only shoulder high but this is something of which I am not yet sure. None have had the energy to do anything except rest in the arms of their saviours. There will be time enough to find out everything about our new brothers later.

After such a tumultuous event I now take the time to rest and complete my journal for this day. The newcomers are a most unusual addition to our number, but there has been no suggestion that they will do anything except come with us on our journey. There is truly nowhere that they can now go, and it has been remarked that it can be no coincidence that we have met them heading in the same direction as our own Fleet. For my own part I feel something in these people that I have seen in the northerner. It may just be the strength that is evident in them all but there are secrets here as well, secrets that I feel will be of benefit to everyone. It is just a feeling but it is one I cannot shake. Only time will tell.

*D*ay Sixty-one

It is with a great sense of satisfaction that I recount the events of this past day. The recovery of the newcomers from the chill of the Grey Sea has changed the focus of all our activities for the foreseeable

future. All are unwell but there are a few of their number who have begun to recount who they are, and how they were found in such distress. It is probably not surprising that Stump has provided most of the information that we now have on the newcomers. He has spoken freely with them, and in the course of these conversations has confirmed that these people have come from the Haarn. This is not surprising, there was much about the ships and debris that indicated they had originated from the Haarn Kingdoms but who they are has come as a surprise. Our new brethren are known to the Haarn as "Kraagers" or in a loose translation as stone slaves, people of the southern lands enslaved generations ago to mine and quarry the harsh regions of the south. It seems that they have quite a story to tell, and it is one that has given us all hope.

For generations the Kraagers had toiled in the quarries of the Haarn, providing the fine stone used in the buildings and other works that we had seen so thoroughly destroyed by the Enemy. Such was the power of their masters that none could throw off the shackles of their servitude until the coming of our mutual foe. With the news that a great force was advancing upon them their guards left the Kraagers to their own fate and fled towards Corin'kraag. In the confusion that followed the slaves collected their families and made for the coast, their goal to take ships and escape into the Grey Sea. They knew that they would find no help from their Haarn masters so they made for a small fishing village south of Corin'kraag called Illeath. There they found fishing trawls and other vessels that could be used to transport their number into the safety of the open ocean. Like their guards the townsfolk of Illeath had fled to the perceived safety of Corin'kraag and with a small fleet at anchor the Kraagers took the ships for their own.

Although not skilled men of the sea they knew enough to raise anchor and head directly west. From what I have been able to determine they left Illeath only days before we arrived in Corin'kraag and have been at sea ever since. Without proper provisions they struggled westwards and had turned to the north-west only in the past few days. It was in the early hours of the day before our finding of their wrecked ships that they met the full force of a power they could not defend against.

Before daybreak a Behemoth rose out of the sea beneath their small ships and rolled slowly in the waves, much as we have seen in the

midst of our own vessels. For the Kraagers however, this benign action began a series of events that led to the destruction of their fleet. As they watched a huge fin came down upon three of their number and in doing so the beast impaled itself upon one of the masts. In a fit of pain and surprise the creature threw up its huge body and crashed down within the centre of the fleet in an attempt to dislodge the offending splinter. In seconds a dozen vessels were swamped beneath a huge wave of displaced water. With many lives lost and many more in danger the Behemoth sank into the depths as the remaining Kraagers raced to the aid of their brethren.

The Behemoth was not finished however. Still impaled upon the broken mast it thrust its way upwards once again, breaching in the centre of the converging fleet, lifting its entire body out of the water. In one final assault it crashed back into the sea, and with its fall threw up a wall of water that swamped or overturned every remaining craft. Many died in those few minutes but many more found refuge on floating wreckage. For a day and a night the Kraagers remained in the water, waiting for the return of the huge creature. Thankfully it did not come. Instead the masts of the Equinox rose from the eastern horizon and rather than death they found salvation. To now that has been their story.

It is a tale that I record here but it leaves open a host of questions that cannot be answered until they have recovered sufficiently. Stump has found one of their number who he has singled out for special attention. Why he has is unknown to me, but I believe all will become clear enough in time. For the moment we must spend our efforts giving them all the care they need. This means also for the moment that I will be remaining aboard the Equinox. I do know one thing though. These Kraagers may have been slaves of the Haarn but here upon the high seas they have no such status. Aboard these ships we are all free men and so it shall be for these souls as well.

Day Sixty-two

With the rescue of the Kraager survivors the number of souls aboard the Fleet has increased considerably. At this time the newcomers are spread widely amongst the different vessels that took part in the

rescue but the largest number are to be found aboard the Equinox. I have stayed aboard with Faren and a few others of our craft to help with the tending of the injured and it has proven a difficult task. The newcomers do not seem disposed to making known what injuries they might have sustained in the attack against their fleet, and almost two days after we are still finding people with broken bones and deeper injuries that are only coming to light with the appearance of bruising and inflammation. The fact that almost none of the newcomers speak any of the common tongues of Adoracia has not helped. As has been required previously we have turned to Stump for translation of our questions and his skills have proven just as effective as before. The northerner's capacity as a polyglot seems to know few boundaries and Captain Rendell has kept him close as the remainder of the Fleet reorganises for the return to our journey.

There is one man amongst the newcomers who is of particular interest. Introduced as Paderian Hedj, he is the accepted leader of the newcomers. As Stump describes him he is a Maturi, or Elder of his people, and although he looks no more than middle-aged he shows all the signs of a man used to leadership. It has surprised us to find that the Maturi Hedj also has a great knowledge of language, and although I did not realise it at first, it was this man of all the other newcomers that Stump had seemed most interested in. The Maturi has spent most of his time aboard the Dromannion talking with Captain Duschet and the other officers of the Fleet. There are rumours moving through the Equinox that the newcomers have brought with them knowledge of the west. If this is true then we may all benefit from their rescue.

Whether the rumours prove true or not cannot detract from the curious nature of the newcomers. They have demonstrated remarkable recuperative powers, and even though it has been less than two days since their rescue most are strong enough to stand and take food on their own. Broken bones and deeper injuries will take time, but they have an indomitable spirit that has seen many of them up and about, helping with their less fortunate comrades.

I must say that I find their language most curious indeed. Even for the Haarn Kingdoms it sounds alien and guttural to the ear, but the people themselves, men, women and children, all exhibit great

optimism for their circumstances. It has proven heartening to those who may have harboured doubts about where we are going. It is in my thoughts that if they truly do have knowledge of the west then we may indeed find a new home, one far enough from the Enemy to be safe.

It has been another busy day and none of us can say what the morrow might bring. In the dark of this evening I can feel the breath of a growing wind rising in the east, rocking the Dromannion at its anchor as the ship rises and falls in the sea's languid ebb. I have heard at the evening meal that we are again to continue our journey westwards with the coming morning. As I look out over a still sea I can only speculate on where our destiny may lie. After the events of the past days there is the possibility that other vessels may well be found out here. Could there be the ships of other Fleets that escaped the Enemy ahead of us? Or are we now alone? Only time will tell.

*D*ay Sixty-three

With the coming of first light myself, Stump and Faren have returned to the decks of the Dromannion. Two of our number remain aboard the Equinox to help with the tending of those Kraagers that are too ill to move, but the rest of us have been ordered back to the flagship. News travels fast aboard ship and even though we are separated by the wash of the sea the news we have just heard has spread quickly through the Fleet. The Maturi of the Kraagers has given our Captain a new direction to travel. Now we are to sail north, making for a group of islands Paderian Hedj calls the Laerion. There we will find food and fresh water springs enough to re-provision before heading west once again. It has been proven true that the newcomers do indeed have knowledge of the west and they tell of a great land that spreads to the edge of the world. It is a great distance to travel however, and finding the islands of Laerion is necessary before making for the deep ocean. Without such a landfall we will not have the supplies needed to reach the new world that awaits us.

The morning has been spent organising accommodation for the Kraagers evenly throughout the Fleet. The Maturi and a few of his attendants have remained aboard the Dromannion but most of the

rest of his people have found berths elsewhere. They have been eagerly accepted aboard their new homes and by midday the Fleet stood ready to weigh anchor and continue. As before the scout ships have taken the lead but this time it is not to feel our way forward in unfamiliar territory. Each now has one of the Kraagers aboard, with knowledge of what lies ahead and a definite plan as to where we are headed.

With the Fleet once again under sail I find myself busy with the duties of my craft. Most of my time is spent below decks and most of the duties I perform are now done unsupervised. The Healer Faren has enough confidence in all of his Assistants to leave us mostly to ourselves. It is clear what we must do, and with the ship crowded with evacuees there is little time available for anything other than the prosecution of our duties. There are still those moments when we can relax but they are proving less and less frequent.

In the evening of this day I was called to the Healer Faren's rooms. There had been a development with the NomDruse boy named Meriarrum and my first thoughts were that his condition had worsened. In the cramped quarters I found the Healer and the young boy himself, sitting in a chair and looking as if he was in some type of trouble. I greeted the Healer and he motioned for me to examine the child. To my amazement I found his skin condition had completely healed. There was no sign of scaring or of any of the other signs that would be associated with a blood disease. His mouth was healed and his lungs clear.

The Healer Faren told me that his remarkable recovery had occurred some time ago, having gone unnoticed in the general commotion of the finding of the Kraagers. Faren had no answer for what might have instigated such a recovery. In his experience such afflictions took weeks to overcome and always resulted in scaring of the skin. The boy seemed to be in perfect health.

Once Meriarrum had been looked at Faren sent him back to his quarters. As soon as it was apparent that we would not be overheard the obvious questions were raised. Was Stump ever alone with the children? If he was, how could he have effected such a remarkable recovery? Faren was honest about the nature of the boy's disease.

Without treatment he could have died, but that treatment had hardly started before the boy had been presented to Faren fully healed.

In answer to the Healer's questions I could only say that there was just the one time that the northerner would have been alone with the children, and that was during the last storm to hit the Fleet. Given the circumstances he could have done anything in the privacy of the children's quarters without any notice being given to it. I could not say what he did for I have not witnessed the exercise of that power myself, but I could not deny that there was a chance he was responsible.

Faren sat back into his chair and placed his hands together. In his eyes I could see he was deciding something, and he took only a moment to do it. Carefully he raised himself and stepped over to a small porthole that gave the room its only natural light. He looked out at the heaving ocean as he spoke, and what he had to say proved surprising to say the least.

Faren knew who Stump was. From the moment that Captain Rendell had described the attack on his ship to Duschet he had known the northerner's identity. The name Shalengael was familiar to him. Like myself he had said nothing at the time. He also could see the benefit in not exposing him, the power that he possessed far more valuable if left undisturbed. The man we knew as Stump was indeed known to his people as Shalengael, and it was a name rooted in the deepest history of Adoracia.

As the Dromannion pitched with the rise and fall of the sea Faren spoke softly as he explained what he knew of the northerner's past. The man Stump was no ordinary sailor. This was plainly evident by the miraculous powers that he could harness, and the knowledge of the world he possessed, but there was much more. The look on Faren's face left me in no doubt that he was serious, and the tale he told went far beyond anything I could have expected.

Long before the time of reason within which we now live, the peoples of Adoracia supplicated themselves to many gods. For most believers the gods were distant beings who affected the lives of mortal men from afar, influencing their lives through the subtle manipulation of circumstance. A few men believed differently. For them the fate of

our existence could be affected directly through the manipulation of a power they called the Hev'duil, and it was available only to those who had come into personal contact with it. It was their belief that the wind held such power, and that there were certain places in the world where such power had a physical presence. Those who had an affinity with the wind could take the Hev'duil and give it form and direction. Such men were known to others as the Gaels.

In their time they were men of power, with an unlimited ability to change and manifest their will upon the world. To wield such power however, came with its own lethal difficulties. They were both feared and despised even though there was no evidence they did anything but good in the world. Those that feared them shunned them and forced them into the wilds of the north. Those that despised them coveted their power and planned for their destruction. One by one they were hunted down and murdered. Even with the power of the Hev'duil at their command they were not immune to treachery and deceit. With the passing of the last of their number the knowledge of their lore was lost. In time the world forgot them and the nature of their power diminished into legend. Till this time those that still remembered the Gaels thought them all dead. The Healer now had to entertain the possibility that one may have survived.

Faren moved back to his chair and pulled an old book from an uneven stack of documents that had been crammed onto his work-table. Within its cracked and broken contents the Healer searched for a particular page and pointed at a name scratched faintly into the parchment. There was no doubt it said "Shalengael" and it named him as one of the Gaels, a Master of the Lore of the Hev'duil.

With such information before me I could see no reason to keep what I knew secret any longer. I told Faren of my own suspicions and what I had seen within the ruins of Corin'kraag. I said also that like himself I had no wish to expose the man. Everything he had done to this time had only been in the best interests of the Fleet, and there was at least one man who would not be alive but for his intervention. The Healer took in everything I said and then offered the terms of a pact to be wrought between us. For the moment we will say nothing. There could be no other explanation except that Stump was indeed Shalengael, and with someone of such power aboard it would be

better that he believed his secret secure. I left Faren to his thoughts and returned to my quarters. There was only one nagging doubt that haunted me as I slumped into my hammock. If the northerner was indeed Shalengael then by the reckoning of Faren's book he would have to be at least six hundred years old. It was a long time to be in hiding.

Day Sixty-four

On this sixty-fourth day of our journey the Fleet tracks north of north-west towards the islands of Laerion. The weather is clear, the sky a mottled veil of high cloud and scattered cumulus. We have been lucky since turning to the north, the winds have remained at our back, pushing us towards our chosen destination. Aboard the Dromannion I find a sense of hope growing amongst us. Somewhere out there is a new home, and it now seems possible that we may just reach it.

The Kraagers have begun to join the rest of the ship's company and are already proving of great value to our endeavours. Even though they stand just shoulder high to most men, they are immensely strong and have taken to the duties of the ship with great energy. After the labours of our journey we find now the focus of our endeavours changing. The Kraagers for the moment are the centre of our thoughts, and that change has brought with it the need for us to teach them the Common English and try and break them free from the sense that they are still slaves. To this end the Maturi Hedj has proposed a change to the way we address the newcomers. From this day forward we are no longer to refer to them as Kraagers. In keeping with an old Adoracian custom we have given a new name to their number. From today onwards they are to be addressed as Kaderas'dwarvendim, which translates roughly as "people of the small ships". Already this has been shortened to Dwarvendim and the newcomers have eagerly accepted the change. Their drab uniforms have been replaced with new clothes from the holds and now they stand with us as equals. To my mind it seems only fair that after giving us such hope that we should repay them in this small way.



*D*ay Sixty-seven

This day has begun with the Fleet pounding its way through high seas and dark skies. Rain has plagued us for the last two days and the winds have turned to the north-east, slowing the Fleet and scattering us wide upon the surging waters. Still we crawl northwards, our goal the islands of Laerion. For the Dwarvendim there is no doubt that these islands exist, but I can record here that not all aboard are convinced. We have been sailing north now for four days and as of yet there has been no sign of land. When asked of this the Maturi Hedj has responded that the Grey Sea is far wider than most would expect and that the distances to be travelled are great. It is the wide spread of the ocean that makes the landfall of Laerion so important. Without the replenishment that can be gained there none of the Fleet will make the distance that remains of our journey to the New World.

Whilst there are some who doubt the words of the Dwarvendim, and I believe that is mainly a product of not knowing how they have come to possess such knowledge, it is apparent that the great majority of us aboard the Dromannion have taken great heart in their certainty. We have been at sea for many days and it has been weeks since we left the sight of land, but the idea of landfall ahead has lightened us all.

Although we wait for the call that signals that land has been sighted I find my own thoughts filled with the words of Faren, and a recurrence of the disastrous dream that has now given me more than one sleepless night. The spires of stone have become all too familiar and I am convinced that they are a portent of dangers to come. Compounding this has been the words of the Healer Faren regarding Stump. I believe now that only myself and Faren are aware of his true nature. It has proven a boon having him as an Assistant to the Healer. Many of our patients have recovered far quicker than they might otherwise have, and I have my suspicions that he is practising a subtle use of his powers in their healing.

Only one point of interest needs to be recorded for this day. One of the huge sea creatures has been spotted to the south of the Fleet. Although I cannot be sure, it has been reported that the Behemoth moves parallel to our course, and for the moment seems to be following us.

*D*ay Sixty-eight

Storms and a cauldron sea confront the Dromannion at the break of this sixty-eighth day. The Fleet is spread wide and a gale races from the east, sending waves crashing over the decks of our ship. Above, the crew work frantically to keep us afloat, and below decks we struggle to lash down everything that might become loose in the storm's frantic rip and tear. Above the crash of thunder, and the pounding exhalations of icy rain that hammers against every exposed surface, I can hear the rigging of the ship straining under the forces being exerted upon its ratlines and tethers. The hull groans with the pitch and yaw of the ship, and from below I can hear a gurgling rush as seawater collects in the ballast-wells below our quarters. In this storm the ship is fighting for its life, struggling against the tremendous forces that are attempting to splinter its wood and crush its spirit. As is my lot I cannot take part in the fight. The Healer and his assistants must wait below in the surgery as the injured are brought for treatment, and as we listen to the grinding assault above it is apparent that many will be visiting us this day.

By mid-morning I have seen eight injured men brought into the surgery. It is with sadness that I record that three have been swept overboard, and a further two have died beneath fallen masts and yards. The foremast has collapsed and now trails in the ocean to the Dromannion's port, skewing the ship in the water, dragging it port-side and dangerously out of balance. From reports coming down to us as the injured are carried in there is a great battle going on to free the mast and loose its trailing rigging. There are fears that we might capsise it this cannot be done and I shudder at the thought of all the souls that will be lost if they are not successful.

Midday has seen three more seriously injured crewman brought in. The surgery is a melee of screaming sailors and the frantic efforts we are making to help them. As we work the decking beneath us shudders as if the Dromannion is dying, but it has not given up yet. The foremast has been freed and in revenge the storm lingers, tearing at the ship as we run before its power. I can feel now however, that it is starting to weaken. I fear for small ships such as the Equinox. It will be a miracle if any of them survive this tempest.

It is only now, in the early evening that I can finish my account of this day. The storm has dissipated and left in its place a mire of drizzle and heavy mists. We can make no tally of the damage to any other vessels but the Dromannion has been hit hard. We have lost our foremast and the top yard of the mizzen. It is amongst ourselves however, that we have taken the most grievous losses. Twelve men have been injured and six have been lost to the churning waves. The passengers of this vessel are all safe and for that I am thankful. It would seem that we have survived the power of the sea once again.



*D*ay Sixty-nine

A new day has dawned and the news from the rest of the Fleet has proven disastrous. In the tempest of the previous day we have lost four ships, three of which have been confirmed as sunk, and one, the Kalborea, that is missing; a total of two-hundred and eighteen souls aboard. All were small vessels, and all stood little chance against the power of storm. The loss of so many has swept away any of the hope which had lightened the days prior to this tragedy. Many have been lost and in the relative calm that has ensued the Fleet has come together once again to take account of damage and make note of individual losses. It is a black day for which I wish to make no further record.

*D*ay Seventy

With little wind to speak of the Dromannion has become busy with repairs. We cannot replace the foremast and the Captain has ordered instead that the decks be cleared and all other repairs be made before we continue on our way. There is still no sign of the Kalborea, and with a slight hope that the scout might find its way back to Fleet it has been decided that we will remain at anchor for the next two days. There is much work to be done.

In the early hours of the afternoon a cry went up from the watch. Something had been sighted to the south. I was on the wheeldeck at

the time with the Healer Faren when all eyes turned to see what had caused the outcry. To my surprise the sky to the south was filled with the dark forms of dozens of winged creatures. My blood ran cold when I realised they were the reptilian beasts of the Enemy.

In an instant the ship came to life. Captain Duschet shouted orders to his officers and once again the bolt-crews took their positions. Everybody who was not needed on deck was ordered below and with the ship bristling with weaponry we waited for the attack that I was sure would follow. It was then that the Maturi Hedj shouted to the bolt-crews to hold their fire. He had been on the foredeck and was desperately forcing his way past the piles of wreckage that still littered the decks as the crews readied their weapons. As he made his way to the wheeldeck there was such a look of concern on his face that Captain Duschet repeated the Maturi's order, standing down his crews and waited for the Dwarvendim to reach his position. By the time he had folded his arms Paderian Hedj stood before him.

The Maturi pointed to the south and gave explanation for his outburst. The creatures were Kreele, beasts well known to the Dwarvendim and not dangerous unless attacked. Those that we had confronted previously were under the dominion of the Enemy, and it was the Dwarvendim's belief that that control ceased as soon as they left sight of land. In a loud voice he explained that it was the time of their seasonal migrations and we would be safe as long as we did not antagonise them.

It took some convincing but Duschet relented and confirmed the orders to restrain his bolt-crews. Quickly flags were raised and the message was sent to the rest of the Fleet. No ship fired upon the Kreele, and instead we watched as the huge creatures swung westwards and disappeared into the western horizon. When they had gone the bolt-crews were stood down, but extra lookouts were placed upon the two remaining masts.

After this had been done the Captain turned back to the Maturi and asked how he knew of the Kreele, and for that matter where they had gained their knowledge of the way ahead. There was no anger in his questions, they were given up as simple requests and the Maturi Hedj responded with a nod of his head. Their knowledge, he answered openly, was gained from the journeys of a legendary

Dwarvendim explorer known to his people as Caren'thal the Younger. Long before their subjugation by the Haarn the Dwarvendim were a seafaring people who colonised the far southern regions of the old world. The Grey Sea was their second home and many expeditions were sent out into the unknown waters of the west to explore what might lay beyond the horizon. Most came back without success but the first voyage of Caren'thal took his ship, the Longreach, straight to the lands of a New World. It was a journey that took years to complete, but he was on a voyage of exploration and did not return until he had mapped most of the coastline of the lands he had found.

To this the Maturi gave pause. Most of these maps had been lost in the wars that had led to their enslavement. One map however, had been kept by the elders of his people, and that map clearly defined the path to the New World. Paderian Hedj had kept custody of that map until the destruction of the Dwarvendim fleet at the hands of the Behemoth. Now there was only one repository of its ancient knowledge and that was the memories of the Maturi himself. Of their understanding of the Kreel, that was hard won by experience and the events of their flight from the coasts of the Haarn. He then restated his firm belief that the Kreel would only attack if provoked.

Captain Duschet took in all that the Maturi said and then made one small request. If the knowledge of their journey was only to be found in the memories of one man then it needed to be reproduced. He motioned to his second officer and sent him on his way. There was one aboard the Dromannion well-known for his map making abilities, and with the Maturi's help the Captain asked that a map of their path ahead be made, the purpose to then have it copied for every other ship in the Fleet. Paderian Hedj bowed slightly and agreed. Such a map would be made.

With the Kreel gone and a clear idea now in the minds of all who might have doubted as to how the Dwarvendim are so certain of their path to a New World, we have returned to our duties. The remainder of my day has been spent in the company of Faren and Stump. Together we have quantified what remains of our herbs and remedies. It is not a job that I particularly like but we all must take turns doing so. By our reckoning we are well-stocked but we have no idea how long our voyage will continue. If the opportunity arises it will be prudent to replenish our stores.

*D*ay Seventy-two

Repairs to the Fleet have been completed and there is no sign of the Kalborea. After two days we can only assume that the ship had been lost alongside its sister-ships in the violence of the storm. It grieves me to think that Captain Lovar and his crew have been taken by the sea but there is little that can be done about it. At midday flags were raised, and in the growing breath of an easterly wind we have returned to the prosecution of our great adventure. It is noteworthy to record that no longer do we view ourselves as refugees. We may have begun this journey in flight, fleeing the suffocation of the Enemy, but with the new maps made by the Maturi Hedj, and the skilled cartography of Fanet Ari, our path into the west is now clear to all.

The Fleet still suffers from the effects of the last storm however. Many ships have been badly damaged, the Dromannion itself losing a mast and suffering a splintering of its starboard hull. Such damage has been repaired but we can now sail only as fast as the slowest amongst us and many ships have been reduced to a crawl, having lost sail and steering to the power of the Tempest. We have been assured that all damage can be repaired, it will however, require a quiet harbour and a new supply of long timbers. It is hoped that both can be found upon landfall with the islands of Laerion.

*D*ay Seventy-three

Today has seen the return of the Behemoth and it has been a day of violence and death. It was at the striking of the last bell before midday that the vast creature rose from the depths and took up station in the midst of the Fleet. The seas were rough and a stiff wind blew across the line of our path to the north. In the swell and spray the creature seemed oblivious to our presence, content to rise and fall upon the surface of the dark waters. Many of our number came to watch the display and marvel at the size of the beast. Its smooth dark-grey body slipped through the water with ease, maintaining its station in the centre of the Fleet.

As a precaution Captain Duschet ordered the Fleet to disperse, and called the bolt-crews once again to their stations, mindful of the possibility that the behemoth might decide to cause the same damage amongst us that it had caused to the Dwarvendim. The ships of the Fleet had no time to find a safe distance before it did so.

As if on a whim the huge beast dived into the depths then rose again at great speed. I do not believe it was a malicious act, more an expression of some great joy that it felt in its existence, but for us the results were catastrophic. Out of the water it rose, its sleek dark body lifting high into the air before falling back upon the sea. It hit no ship on its descent but the force of its fall rose up a swell of spreading water that came at the nearest ships as a wall travelling at great speed. Without time to run or take hold those that were on deck watching the creature were hit with the full force of its breaching. From the vantage I held I could see what was coming and braced for the impact, those on the mid-deck were not so fortunate. The Dromannion heeled deep into the water as the wave hit and most of the spectators on deck were swept into the sea.

Immediately those ships that were close began firing upon the behemoth. From the Dromannion and the Allahard a rain of explosive bolts descended onto the creature, detonating into its side, tearing large pieces of flesh from its body. In an attempt to drive the Behemoth away we succeeded only in angering it further and again it descended into the depths. This time however it breached directly beneath a ship named the Tau'neru. In a sickening crash of splintering timbers the ship exploded, throwing its human contents into the waters. Again the Dromannion and the Allahard responded, throwing their bolts straight at the creature as it hit the water once again. This time they detonated against something sensitive. In a series of explosions the bolts found their marks and the creature writhed within the waves before disappearing. I cannot conceive that we have killed it, but it has been injured enough that it then left us alone.

We had only moments to recover from the shock of the assault. People were in the water and survivors of the Tau'neru clung desperately to anything that was still floating. In desperation those that could swim jumped over the side and quickly lifeboats were lowered into the

heaving swell. Lookouts called directions as dozens of small boats tried to pick up those that had been swept overboard. It was a time of great anxiety but in the end those that could be saved were taken back aboard. Many however, could not be recovered.

At this time the Behemoth has not come back.

*D*ay Seventy-five

At first light this morning the cry arose that we have been waiting for. To the north can be seen a tell-tale darkening against the horizon. It is mountains capped with cloud, and there can be no doubt that we have found the islands we have been looking for. If the map of the Maturi Hedj is correct we will find a chain of islands that extend some twenty-five leagues northwards. With the land clearly visible Captain Duschet has begun organising for the parties that shall go ashore. Myself and Stump are to be allocated to one such party, our task the collection of herbs and roots for the Surgery. It is to be a busy time, and one that has been set very definite bounds.

As soon as the watch gave word of the sighting of land the Captain and the Maturi Hedj called all the officers together. It has been determined that we may only spend three days roaming the islands, finding the provisions we require. It seems that Laerion is a paradise but one that harbours its own secrets. From the writings of Caren'thal the Maturi has determined that there are spirits at rest deep within its fertile soils, and these Beings do not suffer visitors kindly. Luckily the writings of Caren'thal tell that the spirits rest deep and take time to awaken. Three days shall be our limit then we will be unable to return. We may take advantage of any harbours we find but our stay ashore cannot extend beyond this limit.

It is strange to consider the idea that we must take into account the possibility of elemental spirits in modern times such as these, but the Maturi has explained that as Caren'thal the Younger has made reference to them, then we must take them as being real. Excitement grows amongst us as the islands approach. Faren has been told that by the end of day we shall make landfall.

To the Midreach and Clan'dael



Day Seventy-six

The night has passed slowly with the anticipation of our landfall, and beneath the rising suns of morning the Dromannion is at full sail, making steadily for the entrance to a great harbour that lies ahead. We have come far to reach this point in our journey and what stands before us fills our hearts with hope. The islands of Laerion have been described by the Maturi as verdant islands in a wide sea, but what we have discovered exceeds all expectations.

In the twilight of the previous day the Fleet met the southern-most tip of the Laerion islands and in doing so quickly moved northwards. According to the Maturi the main island of this archipelago, known to Caren'thal the Younger as Amen'wraith, lay no more than a dozen leagues to the north. Upon Amen'wraith, it is said, we will find safe harbour and a bounty of food and fresh water, enough to replenish our stores and spare us from any further rationing on our voyage westwards.

With this great boon ahead we sailed north until shallow waters and the gloom of a moonless night forced us to furl sail and drop anchor. It was at first light that we again returned to our course and by first bell of morning the island of Amen'wraith loomed before us. For the best view of the approaching land I found a position high on the foredeck balustrade. Both Stump and Ahlek Norahm were beside me. Amongst the gathering crowd we were but a few white robed men in a crush of people as all strained for our first views of landfall.

In truth I can say that I am not sure what I was expecting. A large number of people crowded upon the different decks of the Dromannion, watching as we skirted the southern edge of the island, looking for the safe harbour described by the Maturi Hedj. As was foretold the island is substantial, consisting of long sand beaches, wide plains of trees and grasses and a series of mountain summits

that rise into the clouds some distance inland. I am unsure as to its actual size but it must extend for at least fifteen leagues from north to south and three from east to west. On the heaving deck of the Dromannion we all stood silent, watching as the island slid by, but it was not the size of island that enthralled us.

Amen'wraith is a paradise, an answer to the hopes of a Fleet that has spent too many weeks at sea. Never have I seen grasses so verdant, or snow-capped mountains so crisp and white in the sunlight. The beaches glow yellow in the light of morning and the forests are a vision of unrestrained vitality. At every turn can be found flocks of birds gliding upon the winds, or herds of great beasts roaming the plains. There is nothing about the island that I can see as having been disturbed by the hands of men. It is as pristine a place as could be found in this world, yet there are even greater wonders to be found here and the greatest of these stands at the entrance to the harbour.

Given the extraordinary state of the island's plant and animal life, it should not have been a surprise that the best of its harbours lay as a quiet tranquil haven. Formed as a wide circle encompassed by two huge headlands, its entrance beckons as a narrow gateway that opens into a cove of quiet water. Straddling both of these headlands lay a huge natural archway of stone that stretches overhead, blocking out the suns as we sailed carefully through its gigantic arch. At the base of each root of the arch stands a huge spire of stone, roughly formed but immense in stature. Each has the appearance of great age, their indeterminate features weathered and broken by the forces of time and exposure.

To the western edge of this natural harbour spreads a wide arc of sand-lined beaches and a series of shear cliffs that line the harbour's headlands to the north and south. The beaches are to be our landing points and with the winds gusting from the east it did not take long for the entire Fleet to sail into the huge harbour. By midday every vessel of our number lay at anchor and the serious business of our stay commenced.

Much has been planned for, but our time here is limited by the warnings given by the Maturi. With the Fleet arrayed across the sheltered bay the first of many small boats went ashore, and from that

point a large encampment has grown quickly upon the beaches. As we have only three days it has been decided that we shall work day and night at the tasks we have given ourselves. Hunters and gathering parties have already begun to delve into the forests to the west and a number of large trees have been selected for felling. I have been scheduled to go ashore at first light tomorrow with the other Assistants and I am looking forward to the chance of standing upon dry ground once again.

Although others have priority on this first day of our stay here, and the duties of my craft have not lessened as I wait for my time ashore, there has been opportunities enough to look out over the island and consider its unusual nature. Much has been uncovered by the initial parties that have made their way into the island's hinterland. All reports that have made their way back tell of a land bursting with life, full of the provender needed for us to continue our voyage. There seems no aspect of this island that can be construed as ill-meant, and in that very fact I have a growing feeling that everything is somehow too perfect, too accessible for our needs. After the hardships of our voyage it all seems to good to be true.

As I write this I feel uncomfortable for I do not wish to appear ungrateful or mean-spirited. The island is indeed a paradise that seems tailor-made for the provision of everything that we might need to continue our voyage westwards. There is something though in the abundance of its gifts that has me wondering if it might not be too convenient. I cannot help but make mention of the feeling that somewhere beneath the island's rich surface there lies a darker aspect, one that will rise to tax a full measure in payment for what we might take from it. The Maturi Hedj's warning regarding the spirits of this place sits in the back of my mind, and in truth I do not know whether my unease is in consequence of that warning, or whether it has its origins at a far deeper level.

I can say that such concerns are not mine alone. The Healer Faren and others have raised the question as to whether we should be taking anything from this land except that which can be plucked from the trees, or hunted upon the wide plains. Faren has cautioned that to take trees or to damage the island in anyway seems contrary to its pristine status, an affront to the gifts that it can bestow to us if we

treat it kindly. Stump and the Maturi have been just as insistent, saying that we have a free rein to take what we need for our voyage, but that we should be tempered by respect for the untouched nature of the land. In their minds we tread in paradise at our peril. I have little doubt that great benefit can be gained from our stay here but we need to be careful. There is something here, I know it.



Day Seventy-seven

The second day of our harbouring in Amen'wraith has been one of great activity and some incredible discoveries. At first light I was awakened by Ahlek, and together with Stump and others of the Assistants we organised ourselves for our day ashore. As with the other parties that have gone before, we have a set number of tasks to perform, and a very tight schedule that must be kept to. For us this day shall be devoted solely to the finding of the herbs, fungi, and other roots and earths needed for our craft. Of all the supplies we require it is these that are the hardest to procure, and so we will spend our day in this pursuit.

By first light our party was ashore. Already the beach had become crowded, many of the gatherers camping in behind the dunes, taking advantage of the opportunity to sleep on dry land. By the time we were able to make it to shore there was already great activity as lifeboats and skiffs were being loaded with the fruits of the previous day's scavenging. Together with Ahlek I made my way to the head of the beach and there found a well-trodden pathway into a broad stand of forest. We did not have to go far to find everything that we were looking for.

In the shadows of gigantic trees the two of us began the task of searching out what we needed. In the depths of the forest our surroundings were alive with activity. Birds sped through the shadows, their wings bright flashes of colour mixed with long lines of sunlight that pierced the canopy above, and everywhere there were insects, engaged in the frenetic movement of their short lives. The

undergrowth was thick in places but within its growth we found much of what we needed. Fungi and aromatic herbs sprung from bark and root, special earths and humus proved attainable at the grasp of a hand. Carefully we did our work, filling our packs and the additional bags that we had brought with us. By midday we were almost finished, only one task remained.

The day had turned warm and with the light of a clear sky cutting through the branched canopy above we took the time to take lunch and enjoy, for a short while, the feeling of firm earth beneath us. Regardless of the misgivings I have felt about the convenient perfection of this island it was good to sit against a tree-trunk once again and feel the texture of dirt between my fingers. The smells and grit of the forest proved a potent balm for senses that had been too long saturated with the salt of the ocean. I can say that lunch tasted all the better for it.

While we had the time I talked with Ahlek on what we had experienced on the journey so far, and in that conversation came to know him better. Unlike most of the Assistants he is young, but very bright, and the owner of a dry wit that finds humour in the most unlikely of events. It surprised me greatly when he turned our conversation to the subject of the island and its bounty. As we talked he expressed his own opinion that it was a shame that we could not tarry longer here. Such was the vitality of Amen'wraith he proposed, that it would have made the perfect sanctuary for the Fleet, and a possible home for us all. But that was the problem, and it plagued him just as it unsettles me. Everything we need is no further than arms-length away and it had struck him that it was all too easy, too convenient for travellers as ourselves that had seen such hardship. For him it had the smell of bait, an enticement drawing us all into a trap. I could not help but agree.

With the midday meal finished we returned to the last task of the day. To the north of our position there had been found a small pool and cascade. Such a location provided the hope of finding a particular lichen that is in great demand as a curative for infected wounds. Of all our medical needs this was the one item that is most highly prized. According to the party that had discovered the pool on the previous day, it could be found only a half hour's walk further within the forest.

As it happened it did not prove difficult to find the waters. The cascade fell from a plateau high above, and made such a noise that we heard it a long time before it came into view. On the cusp of a small rise the pond lay before us as a wide, shallow pool, bordered on most sides by the treeline of the forest, which emptied noisily into a fast running creek that flowed away to the south-west. Carefully we made our way to the base of the cascade, skirting the edges of the water as we looked for the tell-tale russet colouring of the lichen. At the base of the falling waters we found what we were looking for, and then spent a good hour removing small pieces of the lichen from its purchase between rocks and upon the cliff-face itself. We were well pleased with our efforts and after taking a moment to drink and clean ourselves turned to begin our trek back to the beach.

Only then did Ahlek Norahm see the small figures that were watching us. Putting out his arm he brought me to a halt and then crouched upon the trail, pointing into the trees ahead. I immediately saw what he was gesturing towards and dropped to one knee as well. Within the shadows of the forest stood dozens of small figures, no taller than my outstretched arm, but definitely human-like in form although very thin and gangled in appearance. For a few moments we waited, watching as the figures stood motionless in the undergrowth before disappearing back into the forest's depths. I can record here that my pulse was pounding in my ears as we watched them. I do not know what they were, nor whether they could have meant us any harm, but I was glad when they retreated back into the shadows.

By the time of this encounter it was already mid-afternoon, and being mindful of our need to return to the beach, we hurried on our way. With the possibility of such unexpected creatures at our backs we did not stop to enjoy the beauty of the forest, instead we found ourselves concentrating on every shadowed patch of undergrowth or tree-limb that overhung our path. Neither of us could sense if there was danger to be found here, but in the absence of such knowledge we moved all the quicker.

It took us little time to return to the shoreline. Sweating from the exertion we lumbered out of the forest to find the beach a hive of activity and industry. Dozens of boats lined the water's edge and for the entire length of the sands there could be seen cargo being loaded

and the passengers from many ships enjoying the pleasures of a few hours ashore. At the very end of the beach however, there had begun a much more serious undertaking. Upon heavy trestles and bracings the long, thin forms of three new masts were taking shape. Trees had been felled on the preceding afternoon and now ship-carpenters were busy with the difficult task of cutting and forming the natural bends and knotting of the raw timber. Under other circumstances it was a job that would take considerably longer than the three days we have at our disposal, but only the forming of the masts is to be undertaken on the island, everything else is to be done aboard ship once we have cleared the entrance to the harbour and have found ourselves again in open waters.

Within this hive of activity myself and Ahlek began the search for those Healers that were ashore. We had all been given our specific tasks to perform, and with the conclusion of our own mission it was necessary for us to find the others and await the first lifeboat back to the Dromannion. It proved to be a straightforward endeavour. Upon an area of flat sands in behind the first line of dunes the Healer Faren had raised a small pavilion to cater for any medical needs that might arise whilst we were ashore. There we found Faren himself and a number of Healers from other vessels in the Fleet. Most of those who had been sent out into the forests had not yet returned, so both myself and Ahlek took the opportunity to rest in the shade of the spreading canvass and recount to the Healers what we had encountered in the depths of the forest. To my surprise the creatures were already known to Faren. Hunters had found sign of them in the early morning but they had avoided all attempts at contact. The Maturi calls them Morg, an old name for forest-spirits that are said to inhabit the far eastern regions of the Haarn Kingdoms. By his telling such spirits can be malicious creatures but here they have kept a discrete distance. All who now venture into the forests have been told to leave them alone.

With our story told we settled back to await the return of the other Assistants. For a time we rested and then began the unavoidable work of preparing and packing our herbs and earths for transport back to the Dromannion. Faren was particularly pleased with the lichen and questioned us at length about where we found it, and if there was any that remained to be collected. It was as we went about

our task that I overheard the Healers discussing a turn of events for which I had no previous knowledge.

Whilst we had been out in the depths of the nearby forest a small party of Dwarvendim had left the beaches, their mission to ascend the highest of the summits that rest in the island's interior, their goal the snow-capped peak of Troga'hem. The reason for such a mission seemed unknown to all who now spoke of it, but the nature of the party that had left the safety of the beaches was most unusual. Of the men that had departed two were known to me, one being the Maturi Hedj and another, a young man known to his Dwarvendim brethren as the Shadar Len. The remaining four members of the group seemed to be carriers, hefting the gear that would be needed for the Maturi and Shadar to make an ascent of the peak. From what I have observed over the past weeks it is these two men that provide the leadership of the Dwarvendim. To leave the hurried activity of the beaches does not appear wise, but it is not for me to judge. Even the casual conversations of the Healers have left no doubt that their thoughts are divided on what it might mean. It seems however, that the entire enterprise has the full backing of the Fleet Captain. If this is so then there must be meaning to it, and no doubt we will all find out what its purpose is later. It is curious though.

By the hour before nightfall all the parties had returned to the beaches, and loaded with the bounty of Amen'wraith we were ferried quickly back to the Dromannion. Many of the Fleet's number have decided to stay ashore on this last night. The long swathe of the beach is lit brightly with the many fires and lamps of those wishing to make the most of the only piece of firm ground that might be found for many months to come. Although it would be my wish to spend the night ashore it is something that our duties cannot allow. The supplies need proper storage and it is a job that must be done quickly and will take most of the evening to complete. Hopefully there will be an opportunity in the early morning to return to the island one last time.



*D*ay Seventy-eight

Our third day at Amen'wraith has begun, and in contrast to the previous days the weather has turned dark and inclement. From the north a wind has arisen and on its bluster low banks of clouds now crowd the sky. Within the shelter of the bay and its headlands we have not felt the full strength of the winds yet, but in the gathering gloom I can feel the tide changing, the quiet waters of the harbour beginning to agitate as if an unseen hand is moving beneath us. Many people have started to return to the ships of the Fleet, and as I watch I can see large numbers of lifeboats, skiffs and other small transports heaving in the waves as they try to make it back to their ships. The water has grown dark and in the half-light of the morning the air has become chilled. A sense of foreboding has now taken hold aboard the Dromannion. We are all aware of the limits that have been placed upon our stay here and the turn in the weather now sits as a major hurdle to the completion of our plans.

With the second bell of morning a call arose from the watch above. All who were on deck turned their gaze to the north-west and the mountains that now sat indistinct within a mist of shouldering cloud and rain. Upon the peak of Troga'hem a bright light shone out, before being smothered in the banks of approaching rain. Many who saw it pointed out into the approaching gloom but none could say what it might mean. For the Captain on the wheeldeck it was a signal that forced him to action.

In a flurry of commands the Dromannion came to life. Immediately flags and signal lights rose upon the masts and a series of flares fired from the Avernell brought the beaches quickly to action. Tents came down and in the melee I could see the last of the remaining boats pushing off from the shore. Only the masts still lay upon the sands, and wrapped within the gloom I could make out the vague motions of men rolling the half-finished timbers into the sea, and then the frantic activity of boats as the different masts were slowly towed out to their respective ships.

It was as these events were taking place that the weather closed in. From the distant mountains the approaching mists took little time to

reach the shoreline and then overwhelm the Fleet at anchor. With the rain arose a heaving swell, and in the pitch of the vessels Captain Duschet gave the order to begin moving out through the harbour entrance. For the Dromannion, and the two other vessels waiting for their new masts, there could be no chance to move until the timbers had been winched aboard and properly secured. We could only watch as the smaller ships of the Fleet slowly made their way towards the open sea. With so many ships in close anchorage it was going to take time to allow all the Fleet to make way but in my own mind I could see little reason to hurry.

By the accounts of the Dwarvendim we had three full days to retreat from the islands, and that time would not elapse until tomorrow morning at the earliest. In this matter however, we only had the incomplete records of Caren'thal to guide us. It occurred to me as I watched the weather unfold that perhaps it was a lack of confidence regarding the adventurer's writings that had sent the Maturi and his brethren to Troga'hem. They had gone there to confirm something and had obviously found it. The warning light on the mountain peak could only have come from the Dwarvendim, and it had spurred our Captain to immediate action. It could only mean that our time was up, and that somewhere upon the island the Earth Spirits of Caren'thal were stirring. Until the Dromannion had passed through the great arch I had no duties so I found a vantage upon the balustrade of the mid-deck and waited for the mast to be secured aboard.

In the increasing swell the few boats that guided the new mast towards the Dromannion struggled with its weight. In the heave of the waves the length of unfinished timber lay wallowing, only moving under the brute strength of the sailors who strained at their oars as they strove to bring the mast to the Dromannion's port side, there to be winched aboard. My attention was fixed on this struggle, and it seemed impossible that the crewmen could get the timber aboard in time, the churning sea frustrating their attempts at drawing it close enough for winching. What I could not know was the greater struggle that had begun unseen upon the island, one that would prove to be so important to our escape from Amen'wraith.

Faren came to my side as I watched the mast's approach and stood for a time. He was not looking at the sea however. For him there was something far more important happening upon the island itself, and it kept his gaze locked upon the beaches. I noticed what he was doing and looked out into the gloom, wondering what might still remain that could fix his attention so closely. Within the curtains of rain a dark shape remained indistinct upon the sands. It was a small skiff and by its side stood the tall figure of a man. Someone was still ashore.

Immediately I turned to Faren but he forestalled any question I might have. Instead he mouthed the word 'Stump' and then pointed again to the rain obscured beach. I had no idea why the northerner might still be ashore and I could feel a knot twisting in my stomach as I watched what unfolded.

It is strange how helpless a person can feel when confronted with circumstances that are out of their control, but are forced to watch idly as they unfold. In the waters to the port of the Dromannion the crew was fighting a desperate battle to winch the half finished mast aboard. In the rigging above another battle was being fought to ready the ship for departure, and at all sides the once quiet harbour was churning itself into a cauldron sea, pitching and heaving the ship in its swell as the sky turned to a greying blanket of rushing cloud and drenching rain.

In the midst of this I stood unmoving, aware that great labours were being engaged upon around the ship, but with my eyes firmly fixed towards the beach and the disappearing form of Stump. In the gathering darkness I could see little. With each passing moment the Dromannion was edging further towards the harbour entrance and within the squalls of wind and rain I could only find the dim form of the man as a vague shadow. And he was doing nothing but waiting. Again I turned to Faren and it was then that I noticed the dark shapes of the pillars that stood at the entrance to the harbour. They were wrapped in the mists, indistinct behind veils of rain but something was wrong. They were beginning to move.

In disbelief I stared intently upon the pillars and took a firmer hold of the baluster at my back. At that same instant a call rang out from the

forward watch and all attention turned to the incredible sight of the solid stone coming to life. Like giants slowly rising to wakefulness the pillars began to take form, the weathered and beaten appearance of the stone disappearing as each slowly stretched and flexed limbs long quiet. Before our eyes these Colossi grew to monstrous reality and it was only then that the real danger of Amen'wraith became apparent.

From the starboard side of the great arch the Colossus at its base began tearing stone from its root. Huge hands pounded the granite, dislodging fractured pieces of rock that fell haphazardly to the ground. In a rising tide of energy and violence the giant became possessed, its intention seemingly to tear down the arch and trap the remaining vessels of the Fleet that had not yet escaped into open water. The sight of the Colossus at work immediately changed the focus of all aboard. In less time than it took for me to turn to the wheeldeck and find the Captain in the gloom, orders were shouted to the officers supervising the loading of the mast. In seconds its moorings were cut, ditched back into the swell, lost with a crashing spray of water to the priorities of our survival. All hands then went to the rigging, and those that could be spared manned the ballistas that lined the starboard hull. Sails came down from their yards in thundering booms as their sheets immediately filled with air, pitching the bow of the ship deep into the water as the Captain shouted and cursed, driving his men to turn the ship quickly towards the harbour entrance.

At once the ship reacted to the sail, drawing itself ponderously to the east and the beckoning safety of the open sea. At our starboard side the Colossus pounded at the root of the arch whilst on the port headland the other stone giant stood patient, waiting for some trigger that might direct it to action. We did not have to wait long to find out what that trigger might be.

In the turmoil of the storm the Dromannion laboured for the sanctuary that could be found beyond the great stone arch. Luckily most of the Fleet had already made it to open sea, only five ships still remained within the confines of the harbour, the three ships waiting for their new masts, the Dromannion, the Avernell and the Corescant, and two older vessels that were making difficult headway in the rough swell. Against the action of an angry sea we pounded our way

eastwards, and when we were no more than half a kilometre from the headlands the second stone giant came to life. Bending low it raised something within its hand and threw it out into the waters before our ships. It was a boulder the size of a longboat and it smashed into the heaving waves less than a ship-length ahead of the Avernell. Again the Colossus bent low and again another great stone was thrown high towards us. This second missile landed closer, spraying the decks of the Avernell and heaving the ship sideways as it desperately tried to avoid the lethal projectile. The Captain of the Avernell did not wait for the Colossus to bend low once more. From within the rain and mist four long arcs of fire rose from the side of the ship, its port ballistas sending projectiles of their own tracing a path to the giant. Even above the storm I could hear the bolts explode, concussions slamming somewhere within the mists. In that moment both of the Colossi faltered.

In the belief that the bolts had been effective against the stone giant the Dromannion also let loose a salvo of its own. Again the mists were torn by huge explosions and in the light of the concussions we could all see the stone giant take a back step, trying to steady itself as it single-mindedly tried to return to its task. On the southern headland the other Colossus ceased pounding against the arch and instead stooped to pick up one of the large pieces of rock that had fallen at its feet. In one swift movement the boulder sailed through the air, spinning on its axis as it flew between the masts of the Dromannion, before crashing into the sea at our port side.

To counter this new attack the Dromannion turned all its armament to the starboard, unloading round after round of explosive fire upon the southern headland. The Avernell continued to throw bolts against the Colossus to the north, but our fire was now divided and even under the umbrella of explosions that tore at the stone giants' bodies, they did not falter again from their task. Out of the scudding cloud above a huge boulder fell into the midst of the escaping vessels, then a second and a third crashed into the sea, spewing geysers of water into the air ahead of us. It was only a matter of time before one would strike its target.

With a crack that could be heard above the rip and tear of the storm, a deadly missile smashed into the stern of the Corescant, splintering

its wheeldeck and tearing away the rear third of the ship. In a matter of seconds the vessel wallowed in the swell, floundering as it quickly began to sink into the dark waters.

Now lay a terrible decision for the Captains of the Dromannion and the Avernell. Both lay in line to the rear of the Corescant and as we bore down upon the stricken vessel I could see dozens of crew and passengers jumping into the churning sea. More than one hundred and fifty souls dwelt aboard the ship and now most were scrambling for whatever debris could be found. I swear that every person on deck turned to the Captain. To ignore the plight of those in the water would condemn them to certain death in the cold sea. To stop and pick them out of the swell would expose all aboard the Dromannion, more than nine hundred souls, to the same fate. I could not make such a decision but the Captain did. Again commands were shouted out across the vessel, all hands climbing into the ratlines and shrouds, waiting for the order to furl sail. We were going to take our chances and rescue whoever we could.

The Avernell saw what was about to happen and drew up upon our starboard side, keeping some fifty metres distant. Upon her decks I could see ballista-crews pulling the huge crossbows from her port mountings and hurriedly affixing all the weaponry she had to the starboard. In the same manner the Dromannion did the reverse, taking all her armament to the port, the fire-crews hastily mounting and loading the weapons as the two ships furled sail and dropped sea anchors, bringing them both to a stop within the debris that was the remains of the Corescant.

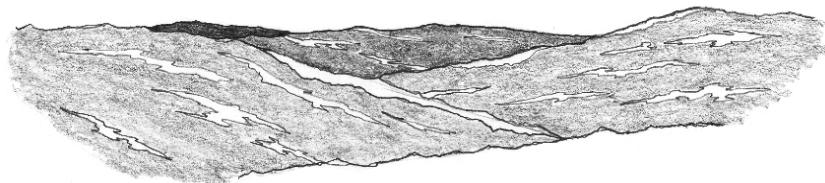
Upon the headlands the Colossi continued about their deadly work, and again huge boulders began falling into the sea about us. This time however the concentrated fire of the two ships arched out over the waters, the whole force of the Dromannion bearing upon the northern headland, the fire of the Avernell striking the south. Within the hail of explosions and flying rock, those that could help began the task of dragging survivors out of the water. We could not lower boats so crew and passengers tied ropes about themselves and jumped into the swell, grabbing hold of the weakening survivors and pulling them towards lowered gangways that scooped them out of the brine.

It was a desperate time. Within minutes of coming to rest the Avernell was hit, a huge boulder smashing through the shrouds of its foremast before landing within the masses of floating survivors. All was chaos, but as the rescue continued our salvation appeared, and in its coming we could do nothing but sit like ducks upon the water and watch.

As I think on it now I can see clearly what happened but are at a loss to explain it. The island of Amen'wraith had given us much, but it is a paradise that harbours a terrible secret. I have no doubt in my mind that the rising of the Colossi were indeed the earth-spirits alluded to by Caren'thal the Younger. We had taken much from the island and now we were to pay a heavy price for that boon. For whatever reason the earth-spirits would now take their toll, taxing us for the supplies and materials we had hastily torn from the land. Only four ships remained afloat and in the violence being visited upon us I could not see how we would not all suffer the same fate. Then the tide turned.

Within the clouds above each of the Colossi, a bright blue light began to shine, and in its glimmer the clouds themselves began to twist and deform. Quickly the mists and rain were swept up in a maelstrom of spinning cloud and rushing air. As I watched the light grew quickly, building in intensity as the violence of the twisting clouds increased. In a matter of seconds both of the Colossi were engulfed in the screaming vortices, their rough forms disappearing within the swirling mists, their arms flailing against the power of the winds.

It was the one respite we needed. Whatever the source of the intervention we now had a chance to haul the remaining survivors from the water. Ninety souls were retrieved, the rest lost to the depths. As the Colossi writhed within their atmospheric bonds we dragged everyone who could be saved aboard and made sail once again. In the heave of the swell the remaining ships of the Fleet made the headlands and then sailed cleanly out into the storm-swept sea beyond. It was only as the Dromannion rode its way beneath the great stone arch that I remembered Stump and searched the shoreline at our rear. In the gloom of the storm I could see nothing of him, only the faint hint of a bluish glow emanating from somewhere ashore. I can only believe that he has now been lost to us.



Day Eighty

For two days we have rode the waves at anchor, having travelled no further than the northern edge of Amen'wraith. Our escape from the torment of the Colossi has left us with much to repair and a need to take stock of what we were able to obtain from the islands. It is evident that apart from the last few hours of our stay upon Amen'wraith, we were able to find everything that we needed for a voyage of at least four months. All the ships of the Fleet lay low in the water, full holds a measure of the bounty we were able to scavenge from that brooding paradise. It was not without cost however. In those last desperate hours of our escape we have lost the Corescant, and sixty of her complement. Another ninety souls now crowd aboard the Dromannion and it seems that this has not been the total cost of our stay. The Avernell now mourns eight crewmen in the exchange with the stone giants, torn from mast or swept overboard in the hail of boulders. Only with the dawn of yesterday has it been confirmed that not only had Stump remained behind on the island, but that the Maturi Hedj, his companion the Shadar Len, and the other Dwarvendim of their number have also been left to an uncertain fate.

Such losses have left us in despair but the voyage must continue, and to that end we have all been put to our duties, preparing for a long traverse of the deep ocean to our west. The Dromannion has lost its new foremast and because of this the ship has had to be trimmed and rigged for only two masts. As far as anyone knows there will be no further opportunity to obtain new timber so we are now shackled by this disability. The Captain seems content however, that he has a ship at all, and in this there is complete agreement amongst all who sail with her.

The storm that so briskly assailed us while we were at harbour has moved on, its cloud and winds pushing to the south-east. In the calm of this day we have been hard at work, providing proper storage for all that we obtained from the island, and reorganising our accommodations to fit the additional passengers and crew from the Corescant aboard. To this end all the Healer's Assistants have been moved from our cabin to a new berth on a lower deck of the ship. To call it a berth however, is somewhat charitable. To find room for us we have been placed in what is called the Capstan Well. Here, within a small rectangular room in the mid-decks we have been asked to find a good night sleep, and sufficient room to stretch our legs. It has proven difficult as the Well is dominated by a huge rotating wooden drum, which serves as a shaft connecting a winch upon the deck above with the gear that pulls in the anchor on the deck below. We have found that at those times when it is necessary to drop or raise anchor that the movement of the crew above as they labour with the capstan, the turning of the shaft, and the rushing grind of the messenger cables below creates a deafening noise that clears us quickly from the room. The only saving grace to this situation is that it is infrequent and should be less so once we are once again under sail.

In the course of our day's work I have heard much rumour surrounding our escape from Amen'wraith. The appearance of the stone giants and their entrapment within the extraordinary vortices of blue light has left all the complement of our vessel in a state of frantic speculation. In truth I do not know what happened but my suspicions lay in this matter with Stump.

I have learned from Faren that the northerner asked no permission to return to the beach. Why he was waiting there as the rest of the Fleet departed is unknown. It is possible however, that he knew the Dwarvendim could not make it back to the ships and had resolved to wait for their return. The rise of the Colossi had surprised everyone and no doubt had changed any plans Stump might have had to get the Dwarvendim off the beach. It is almost certain that the reason for the northerner's actions will remain a mystery and it is a great shame that all those men have been left behind. The knowledge and skills they possessed will be difficult to do without, but above all I counted the northerner as a friend, and this pains me the most.

*D*ay Eighty-one

At midday today the Fleet has been scheduled to make sail for the west. According to the maps provided by the Maturi our journey now lies in this direction, passing to the south of the Til'carrión Islands before heading north to a part of the Grey Sea known as the Midreach. Here it is said we will find an island chain named by Caren'thal the Younger as Clan'dael. Unlike the Laerion Islands, Clan'dael holds no particular significance, but it will make a suitable point to harbour before the longest, and most perilous leg of our journey to the New World begins. Thankfully there have been no mention by any of the Dwarvendim of earth-spirits or any other boundaries to our stay there. The only point of note given by them is that the Til'carrión should not be approached. There is no mention of why, just a determination that it would be dangerous to do so. I am happy to record here that our Captain has taken such advice to heart.

It is now the last bell before midday and preparations for the return to our voyage are almost complete. I have taken a few minutes as we wait for the order to raise our anchors to write these words and then rest before the Capstan Well springs into life. It is my hope that this next leg of our journey will prove uneventful.



*D*ay Eighty-two

This eighty-second day of our voyage has passed into memory and it has been one filled with the routine of the ship and the consequences of a most remarkable happening. My melancholy at the demise of Stump and the Dwarvendim has proven to be premature, and with some considerable joy I now have the opportunity to relate what has happened. In the hour before midday of the day past, I was relaxing in my new quarters, along with a number of the other Assistants. Ahlek was with me, and as we waited for the sounds of men organising themselves upon the capstan above, we talked on the

events of the last days. The landing at Amen'wraith had been both enlivening and tinged with the sorrow of our losses, but we spent most of the time available to us talking about Stump and the circumstances of his strange actions. I must confess that I was about to tell Ahlek what I knew of the northerner. With him now lost to us there seemed little point in keeping his true identity in shadow any longer. I am grateful that I did not.

With the commotion of the crew organising themselves against the huge winch on the deck above us, we both knew that the order to raise anchor and begin the next leg of our journey had to be close at hand. Together we left the Capstan Well and made our way back to the mid-deck. I have not yet lost the feeling of excitement that comes when the crew is given the order to make sail. As it transpired I was fortunate that I was on deck when the call came from the watch above.

“Sail to port!”, came the cry from the mast head above us and all turned their attention in that direction. The Dromannion was flanked on its starboard side by the wide array of the Fleet, but a few ships were to our port side, and most who were on deck looked not because it was important, but because the question was raised in all our minds as to why it might be something worth a call from the watch. To everyone's surprise a small boat was making all speed towards us from the direction of the islands.

From the wheeldeck came a brace of running officers, shouting to the available hands to begin lowering the port gangway, and as I looked back to the Captain I could see him straining to gain a clear identification of who it might be. The boat was ours and I had no doubt who it could be. Only one skiff had been left behind and sure enough Stump was sitting at the tiller, tacking the small craft directly towards the Dromannion. Such news travels fast and within minutes the decks were crowded with people, both passengers and off-duty crew, all watching as the skiff rose and fell in the swell, making its way slowly to the side of its mother-ship.

Most importantly however, it was the Captain himself who came to the top of the gangway and waited for the retrieval of his boat. Only on a few occasions have I seen the man leave the confines of his

wheeldeck. He is Lord and Master of his ship, leaving the routine of the vessel to his Officers and the dozen or so Mates that keep the Dromannion in good order. This time he stood as a man both excited and strangely grim. Something was about to happen and his presence at the top of the gangway ensured that all who were on deck would remain there until it played itself out.

The skiff came to rest at the foot of the gangway and was quickly winched out of the sea and secured to its davits. The three passengers however, waited upon the small platform that formed the lower part of the gangway's reach into the swell below. All looked as if they had been through a great ordeal, and it did not pass without notice that two of the Dwarvendim were missing.

It was the Second Officer that shepherded Stump, the Maturi Hedj and the Shadar Len aboard. All were embraced warmly and the Dwarvendim were then taken to their cabins. At their heals followed the Healer Faren and Ahlek Norahm, the Captain's order to begin tending to whatever injuries they might have sustained in their escape from Amen'wraith. Stump was not so kindly dealt with. Whilst the Captain looked on the First Officer proclaimed to all present that the northerner had taken a vessel of the Fleet without authority, and had chosen to place himself in danger without due consideration of how that might then endanger others. The fact that he had rescued the Maturi and Shadar was to be taken into account, but such charges could not go unanswered. To all it was declared that Stump had earned for himself the sanction of two weeks in the Brig, and that such punishment could not be appealed. In a crush of protesting passengers the northerner was shackled as if he was a common criminal, and then taken below. Curiously he did not seem at all bothered.

With the skiff aboard and Stump and the Dwarvendim safely below the order was given to make sail. I watched from the starboard balustrade of the quarter-deck as the Fleet got under way, filled with the same sense of excitement that I have felt for the start of each leg of this great journey. There is nobody aboard who is not thankful for the return of those we had thought lost, but it has been tainted by the punishment metered to the northerner. I have determined that when I have the time I shall try and understand why it was necessary.

*D*ay Eighty-five

We now stand three days into our journey from the Laerion Islands and the routine of the ship has reasserted itself firmly. The weather has remained fair, a steady wind from the south-east pushing us quickly westwards. The Fleet rides the waves, the wakes of many ships stirring the sea as we move upon a world of water that stretches to all horizons. All the Healers have returned to the strict discipline of their duties. As has been the case so far we spend the morning tending to those who come looking for our aid, and then spend the afternoon searching out those who need our help but do not seek it. Such work has taken me to every part of the ship and I have noticed that many of the ailments that previously afflicted those aboard have disappeared. The provision of fresh foods and a dose of dry land have done wonders for the general health of all. I have noticed also that whilst most of us were ashore upon Amen'wraith that the crew who remained aboard have cleaned and smoked out the ship, clearing away most of the vermin that previously resided here. This has had an immediate effect on the spread of an unknown skin affliction that had been starting to take hold aboard the Dromannion.

The Grey Sea spreads before us as a vast wasteland of moving water, one that changes its nature with each passing hour. I have seen great storms passing to the south and for most of the day we have had the benefit of a stiff easterly breeze that pushes us ever westward. As I look into the limitless expanses of the horizon I cannot help but think back at the events of the past days. The beauty of Amen'wraith and the malevolence of the earth-spirits is a strange paradox, one that underlines how little we know about where we are headed. Our efforts whilst in Amen'wraith have however, set us in good stead for the voyage ahead and although the cost had been high we remain in good spirits. It is my hope that for the remainder of our journey we shall not be presented with any further paradoxes such as Amen'wraith.



Day Eighty-six

Today I was given permission to go and visit with Stump. He was in need of his books, and had requested that they be brought to him. The Master-of-the-Watch was under no obligation to do so, but gave authority for them to be received and I immediately volunteered for the duty. It was a good opportunity to find out what had transpired on the island, one I was not going to let pass.

With books in hand I made my way to the Brig, and there found Stump entombed within one of its four cells. He appeared in good health but seemed less gracious about the reasons as to why he was imprisoned than he had at first presented. The books however were well received. I asked if I might stay for a short time and spent a good hour talking with him on the events surrounding the appearance of the Troga'dahl, as he called the earth-spirits, and his return to the Dromannion. I did not expect him to say anything regarding the entrapment of the stone giants and he avoided any comments of that, however he did take the time to tell me everything else that had happened. It was quite a story.

Everything started with the departure of the Maturi and his attendants to the peak of the Troga'hem. To most it appeared no more than a simple sojourn inland to explore the summits of the island. The Dwarvendim were mountain people after all, and such an expedition seemed as logical to him as the need for the rest of us to spend time at the beach. This was not entirely the case however. The Maturi was making the ascent to give better warning of the approach of the earth-spirits, as it was a fact of their arising that certain signs would become visible, and it was their feeling that such signs could be best identified from altitude. Stump was not sure that there would be enough time for the Dwarvendim to return and turned his thoughts to how he might assure their escape back to the Fleet.

When the signal came from the summit of Troga'hem that the rise of the earth-spirits was imminent the Fleet readied itself, and in that activity no-one noticed as the northerner slipped the holds on the small skiff and made his way ashore. With the appearance of the stone giants he had little choice but to wait, hoping that their

attention would not turn upon him. Stump described the battle to gain the mouth of Amen'wraith's harbour, but said nothing on the origin of the blue vortices that entrapped the spirits so effectively.

With the passing of the last vessels of the Fleet into the Grey Sea, the vortices faded, releasing the Troga'dahl from their magical restraints. Immediately they both made for Stump, leaving their positions at each headland and advancing towards him from the northern and southern ends of the beach. He could not launch the Skiff, the storm had turned the harbour into a cauldron of shredded waves that would have capsized the small craft within minutes of leaving the shore. Instead, the northerner abandoned the boat and his position on the beach, and ran for the cover of the forest with the enormous stone giants in pursuit.

The Troga'dahl had been foiled in their attempt to extract full payment for the boon we had gained from Amen'wraith, but in the fleeing figure of the northerner they must have seen a small recompense. Stump could do nothing but run for the safety of the trees and the anonymity that might be found in their shadows. The stone giants were not about to give up. In great clawing swipes of their malformed hands they uprooted huge tracts of the woodland, smashing timbers and scooping out the ground below in their attempt to find the elusive figure. By some combination of luck and skill Stump was able to elude his pursuers, and with the giants searching the trees to the east, took refuge in a hollow found beneath the roots of an ancient Oak. Within its cool shadows he waited until the stone giants had gone and the forest once again became quiet.

By the time he was sure that he was alone the storm had moved on and the Troga'dahl were nowhere to be seen. He had survived the fury of the earth-spirits, but his only concern was the return of the Dwarvendim to the Fleet before it departed for the Midreach. To do this he would need to find them. First however, he had to check on the seaworthiness of the skiff he had left on the beach. Without it there was no going anywhere and with this objective in mind carefully made his way back to the harbour. To his surprise the boat was still intact and standing beside it he found both the Maturi and the Shadar Len. There was no sign of the other Dwarvendim, the unfortunate truth revealed that all were dead, taken by the Troga'dahl as they tried to draw the giants away from the Maturi.

Of the Troga'dahl there was now no sign. It seemed that they had returned to the earth, the great columns of stone again visible at the mouth of the harbour. For the Maturi this did not mean that they could now sail out into open waters. He could not be certain that to make for the entrance might not yet again trigger the rising of the Colossi, and counselled against trying. Instead they formulated a plan that required they drag the skiff to a small beach on the other side of the northern headland. Exposed to the open sea, this beach would provide them with the access they needed to return to the Fleet without awakening the earth-spirits once again.

Such a task would require both time and great effort, however. The beach the Maturi spoke of lay some six kilometres to the north, beyond the thickest part of the forests bordering the harbour, and across a wide area of rising stony ground from which the northern headland thrust out into the Grey Sea. In this matter however, they had little choice but to attempt the crossing. They started in the late afternoon, dragging the skiff deep into the forest until they could go no further, then made camp until the first light of the new day. That following day passed as the three men hauled at the boat, finding a torturous passage through the woodlands until they came upon a series of stepped hills. In the failing light of evening they knew that they could go no further and made camp once again.

That second night was spent at the base of these hills, and it was in the lightless hours before dawn that their small party encountered a large group of the island's forest dwellers. In the mists of the early morning Stump was awoken to the sounds of movement in the trees surrounding their camp. Quickly he woke the others, and with makeshift weapons at hand, waited for the creatures to make themselves known. As with my own experience the shadowed figures did not attack nor attempt to communicate, instead they maintained a short vigil before fading back into the gloom of the forest. It was the northerner's distinct impression that the small beings seemed confused by the men's continued presence on the island. They seemed to harbour no ill-will but were curious as to why the skiff was being hauled through the forest. It was the last they saw of the Morg.

The second full day of their ordeal was concerned only with taking the skiff over the stony rises before them, and it was not until the fall

of the suns in the west that they had achieved their aim of crossing this barrier. The northerner commented openly that it could not have been done but for the enormous strength possessed by the Dwarvendim. A hard life of slavery had equipped them for the rigours of such a task and together they had prevailed where other men might have given in. It was Stump's opinion that such men are better kept as allies than enemies. Such determination he said, could be found in few other peoples.

The remainder of the northerner's tale played itself out with the skiff being dragged into the water in the quiet of the following morning. With the suns rising before them the boat's small sail was unfurled, catching the first breaths of wind that had begun to push from the south-east. If the three men had been even an hour slower in making the Fleet they would have been left behind, and such would have been their fate.

I could see in the northerner's face and posture as he recounted his story that the ordeal had taken a great deal from him. Unlike other conversations that I have had with Stump, where the quickness of his wit and the depth of his knowledge would tax anyone's ability to simply keep up, he now fumbled for words beneath the blanket of a fatigue that was far more than just physical. I left him to his books and returned to the solitude of my quarters within the Well. I have no further duties today and I find it gives me the time to think on the events of the last days, and wonder at the power that must have been brought to the task of ensnaring the Troga'dahl. I can concede that I do not have much knowledge of the Gaels, and within that limitation I do not know the extent of their powers. If it was indeed Stump who rendered the stone giants ineffective then it is perhaps no surprise that he has been diminished by the effort.



Day Eighty-seven

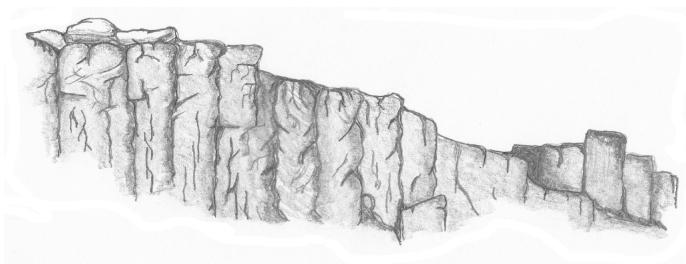
The routine of our ship continues, the steady winds a regular bluster from the south-east. Clouds have begun to crowd the northern sky, placing a dark border on what has been an otherwise clear day. It is now evening and I find myself once again upon the foredeck, taking in a few minutes of fresh air before I return to my quarters below. Such times have become more precious to all of us who live in the Well. Without windows it can be a confinement tolerated only because we need be there just for sleep. Eight of us now call these quarters home, and it is probably four too many.

On this fine evening the decks are alive with activity. The Dromannion is a large ship, more than eighty metres in length, but it carries more than nine-hundred souls aboard and most spend the greater part of their day below decks. All who can take the time to breathe fresh air and get exercise, and it is due to the latter that the mid-deck is now teeming with excited passengers and crew. In the temperate conditions the perfect opportunity has presented itself to engage in a team sport known as Shurdu. Although simple in its rules it requires great physical endurance and has become a favourite recreation for all aboard, allowing the stresses and frustrations of our day to be released without malice upon others. It is an activity that has grown quickly in popularity, and one that now disturbs my moments of solace upon the foredeck.

Consisting of a cleared area no more than fifteen metres square, the playing surface for Shurdu is compact and made for quick results. Two teams of four compete, the objective for one team to place a small ball of tightly sewn rags outside the square, the objective of the other to stop them from doing so by any physical means possible, the only restriction that no player can place his hands upon another. When one team is successful the objectives are reversed and the attackers then become defenders. Points are scored on how many times a team is successful in defence. A dropped ball ends that team's possession. Skilfully done it is a test of both strength and finesse, whilst providing endless opportunity for controversy due to the subjective nature of its scoring system.

As I listen to the excitement of the games at my back there is just enough light to watch the endless vista of the Grey Sea ahead. Lightning arcs in great bursts of light on the northern horizon, and I can feel the first hints of a change in the wind. From my perch beside the forecastle I can hear the rush of the ship as its bow cuts cleanly through the waves below. As dark shadows shrouded in grey the rest of the Fleet sails with us, dozens of white-capped wakes the only evidence of our passing.

A person could be forgiven for thinking that there is nothing before us except the sea, but we have no choices now. Everything is staked upon the accuracy of the Maturi's maps and the truthfulness of Caren'thal the Younger's accounts. If indeed there is a new world in the west it must lay a great distance ahead. For the moment however, our goal remains the Midreach, and the islands of Clan'dael.



Day Ninety-one

Today has seen the return of great numbers of Kreeл flying at altitude towards the north-west. As before we did little to bring attention to ourselves and in consequence none of the creatures faltered in their flight. It has been the third day in succession where flocks of the winged reptiles have been seen overhead. I am not alone in wondering where the Kreeл are making for, the Captain himself having mentioned their passing in each of his morning meetings with his officers.

For their part the Dwarvendim cannot provide any more information than that which has been given to them by the writings of Caren'thal. Where the Kreeл are making for is unknown, however the thought has been broached that the islands of Til'carriон may well be their

destination. We cannot be sure, and Captain Duschet has ordered the making and fitting of six new ballistas to the sides of the Dromannion. Such work has kept the ship's carpenters and solitary blacksmith busy for the past two days. It will be at least three more days before they will be ready. I am considering whether I should volunteer to be trained in their use. I believe the ship will need additional bolt-crews to man them and it would be an interesting diversion from the routine of my duties.

I am happy to say that the NomDruse children have begun to show more interest in the daily activities of the ship. Since their rescue from Corin'kraag they have remained below decks, seemingly withdrawn from all that has been occurring about them, but such isolation cannot be allowed to continue. Their quarters in the lower fore-deck have been renamed as the Cresh, a Haarn word for sanctuary, and seemingly fitting to the small world that they have built for themselves. Only a few of those that tend their needs have been able to get close, but slowly they have opened up and for the first time today a few have appeared above decks. I have talked with Stump on this and he has said that the children have been taught to distrust others, and it is a barrier that shall keep them apart until they see that we pose no threat to them.

The northerner remains in the Brig, his captivity a point of considerable discussion amongst both the crew and the refugees aboard. It has come to light that only the successful rescue of the Maturi and his Shadar kept him from a public flogging, a common punishment for those who act without the consent of the Captain. For his part Stump now seems very happy with his captivity. If nothing else the Brig is clean and well-kept, and as the only resident at this time he has both room and privacy, something highly prized on a crowded ship. His lack of freedom has been offset in his own mind by the lack of duties he must perform and he appears to be making the most of the time available to him. Given the disregard he is now held in by the Captain it will be interesting to see if he remains a Healer once his incarceration has passed.



Day Ninety-two

The weather has now worsened, the winds swinging to the south. Banks of cloud have begun to move in our direction and there are curtains of rain blanketing the sea both eastwards and at our stern. The winds are brisk but come at us in blusters that keep the crew busy with the sails, and cause the ship to roll with each blow. All the ships of the Fleet remain in good order however, and in spite of the loss of our foremast, the Dromannion keeps pace with the vessels that ply the waters about us. On all sides the Fleet rides the waves, and all aboard seem optimistic of our prospects, regardless of the steadily rising seas.

I must mention before continuing that the Krelle have made a further appearance to the north. A great gathering of the reptiles can be seen circling at the far horizon, a swirling flock of leather-winged creatures that are too indistinct in their distance to be properly observed, but close enough for the Captain to prescribe a continuous watch upon them. The weather provides no help in our need to watch them carefully, banks of cloud moving between us as we head westwards, obscuring our view in a procession of grey veils. So far they have given no cause to show that they wish to attack us. It seems that the experiences myself and others had upon the shores of Corin'kraag will not be repeated upon the open sea. Still we watch, and prepare for any sign of approaching danger.

It is with some surprise that I can now report that Stump has been freed from his imprisonment. Although the full fortnight of his captivity has not yet passed he has been returned to the ranks of our number to continue his training as a Healer. He seems quite unhappy with his early release. The solitude that he has been enjoying has ended abruptly and Faren has promised that he is to be fully returned to the burden of his duties. There are rumours circulating that the Captain was most vexed by the apparent contentment of his prisoner, and in an effort to forestall any further relaxation had him released to normal duties. It says much about the hardships of our daily lives that the Captain considered this as an option.

The routine of our ship continues, and with the encroaching weather as a grey backdrop I can see the crew hard at work, preparing the ship for its onslaught.

Day Ninety-three

Early this morning the weather ran us down. In the gloom of a fog-ridden dawn the first cloud banks overtook the Fleet and in its embrace we have been beset by rain. I thank Fate that there are no great storms buried within its cold, gathering arms but the winds and rain have hammered at our ship and continue to roil the waters about us with its deluge. The Dromannion pitches in the high seas, and in the ferocity of the wind white-caps are forming on the swell, spraying brine as a stinging mist across our decks. It is going to be an uncomfortable day.

Day Ninety-five

For the past days the rain has given us no respite, the sea rising in huge waves that have left our ship bobbing like a shard of cork in a swinging bucket. Without rest all hands have fought against its continuing assault, and in the late hours of the day we have finally seen sign of its passing. There has been little damage caused by the weather and for this I am thankful. All indications are that the Fleet has suffered no losses though a new threat has emerged in the distraction of the gales, one that may prove far more difficult to fight against.

For most of the afternoon myself, Stump and another Assistant by the name of Damon Ensh have been busy in the bowels of the ship, clearing a small area in the steerage as a makeshift quarantine area. An unusual affliction has been uncovered in our routine search of the ship and we cannot determine yet what it is. As a precaution Faren has placed a young girl in isolation. We do not know if her malady is contagious, only that the sickness brings on a high fever and tremors of the limbs that have proven hard to control. Damon has volunteered to stay at the girl's side, and we have set guards to ensure that she remains out of reach to all but those who tend her. The

Healer Faren is not saying what he thinks it might be but I have not seen him this worried for some time.

Day Ninety-six

The weather has passed and the sky has turned to a clear vault of blue, only high clouds trailing as thin wisps to the south any indication of what we have endured. Below decks our situation has turned quickly for the worse and now our attention must focus inwards, to the well-being of the girl and of Damon Ensh. Within hours of her quarantine Damon has also fallen ill. To our dismay the remainder of her family have also presented with the early signs of the infection, and now we have been forced to cordon the entire deck, evacuating more than one hundred people to temporary quarters on higher levels.

We have no idea yet as to what the malady might be. Everybody who might have come into contact with the girl or her family have been separated from the rest of the ship's complement, and now we wait to see if there are any new signs of its spread. Damon has not yet succumbed to the tremors that now wrack the body of the girl, but his reports show that the disease is quick to strike and relentless in its occupation. Faren has conferred with his colleagues aboard the Avernell and it has been decided that the Dromannion must be declared a quarantined vessel until the disease has run its course. None of the other Healer's Assistants have been allowed to enter the steerage and help Damon and we are left with little to do except watch as the malady runs its course. Whether it is a mortal affliction we do not yet know. It is our fear that it has been aboard ship for some time, smouldering quietly beyond notice, awaiting an opportunity to take hold amongst us.



Day Ninety-seven

We continue westwards and the situation below decks has worsened. Thirty-two passengers have now fallen ill, six hanging close to the edge of death. Damon has not yet lapsed into unconsciousness but he feels the effects of the malady spreading through his limbs, a strange prickling sensation that begins at the shoulders and spreads outwards to the arms and lower trunk. We talk to him through the companionway doors but can have no direct contact with him. Within the lowest deck he remains alone to tend those who have fallen ill. Soon he will need help himself, and it will be up to one of our number to enter the steerage and try and determine what it is that has spread so quickly amongst us.

At midday a meeting was called between the Healers and the Captain's Officers. None of the crew has yet been afflicted but passengers on the lower decks make up most of those who have been struck down. Without any hint on the transmission of the disease we have been asked to clear all the lower levels of passengers and make space for them on the weather-decks. Until the disease has taken its course it has been decided that all who remain unaffected must live at the mercy of the elements. Fortune is with us only in that the weather remains fine, the first sign of rain will surely send everyone below once again. It is our hope that the weather will hold until we can find some way to fight this affliction.

Stump has volunteered to go below and help Damon with his patients. The Shadar Len has also agreed to take his chances in the steerage, along with a young Dwarvendim woman by the name of Lanja Narris. Such a move has been resisted by Captain Duschet but the Healer Faren has agreed that something must be done, and both he and I know that Stump is probably the best person to send below. As of yet only myself and Faren know of the true identity of the northerner and in the confines of the lower decks it is our hope that he might be able to discretely do something to help.

The Dwarvendim are a different matter. None have yet been fallen ill and it is possible that they have a resistance to the disease. Both the Shadar and Lanja Narris seem eager to be of help and in the evening

they were provided with what they would need and sent into the steerage. Until this crisis has passed we will not see them again.

Before I close my journal on this day I must record a most unusual event. The wind blows strongly at our back and in the failing light of the day I can see the Fleet spread about us in all directions. Both the Dromannion and the Avernell serve as the centre of a wide dispersal of ships, with the Equinox and the Arboron at the front, scouting the way ahead. It is at dusk that the navigation lanterns are lit upon all the ships, and if the weather is clear it is possible to see as points of light all the vessels of our number forging into the gathering dark. Tonight it is particularly clear, and with my duties completed I took the time to watch the onset of night from the foredeck. It was as I stood leaning against the foreword ballista mounting that I heard the sound of a great rushing of air from somewhere in the gloom. To anyone else it might sound as nothing more than the surge of water against the ship's bow, but I am a Potter by trade and know well the long exhalation of a bellows as it forces air into a kiln. Out on the open sea it was not a sound I would expect to hear.

For some time I listened to the running of the wind and the surge of the ocean until it came once again, a long drawn out expulsion of air as if a great creature was exhaling after holding its breath. In the dark it was impossible to see anything, but another great exhalation came from further ahead, and then a series that left me with no doubt that a group of huge beasts lay somewhere in the darkness to our starboard. I was about to call to the watch when something slid beneath the bow, a large shape that glowed dim blue in the black wash of the sea before disappearing beneath the Dromannion's hull. Three more of the vague luminescent shapes followed before all was again quiet. Nobody has yet taken what I saw seriously, I have no evidence of the encounter, but I have informed the Second Officer of the Watch and he has duly noted what I described in his log.



Day Ninety-nine

Today is the ninety-ninth day of our voyage, and I can record that the Fleet stands becalmed upon the Grey Sea with no hint of a breeze to fill our sails. For the past two days it has been this way, the ships of the Fleet wallowing in a still and languid ocean, only the current carrying us towards the west. The winds that have so faithfully transported us to this point have disappeared, and in their absence we sit heavy in the water with little to do except concern ourselves with the widening troubles below deck.

The sickness has spread like a grass fire on a wind-swept plain. With the ill now numbered at one hundred and thirteen, there seems no end to the transmission of the illness. Forty-five of those afflicted have passed into a deathly unconsciousness that seems to have no escape. None have yet died but Damon Ensh can no longer tend to the sick and has himself fallen into a pallid sleep. Stump and the Dwarvendim continue on with his work and have been joined by fifteen more of their brethren, none of whom have yet succumbed to the virulence of the tremoring disease. They appear to have a natural immunity and with guidance from Faren are doing what they can to contain the outbreak. For all our work we have been unable to stop the disease's spread and can do little except look for the first signs of its catching, a tremoring at the centre of the back that spreads quickly across the shoulders.

Many of the Dwarvendim who are aboard the Dromannion have found themselves needed below, but most remain above, mingling with those passengers who have had the good fortune to escape infection. It has given me some opportunity to observe their ways and the nature of their customs, many of which are quite peculiar. Their language remains a mystery to me, its guttural tones as different from the common languages of Adoracia as any I have heard, but it is their need to observe a strict routine of ritual observances that I find most intriguing.

Although it has been hard to grasp the reasoning for their customs I have found that most relate to an ongoing need to appease powerful forces connected with Stone and Wind. Of greatest importance is the

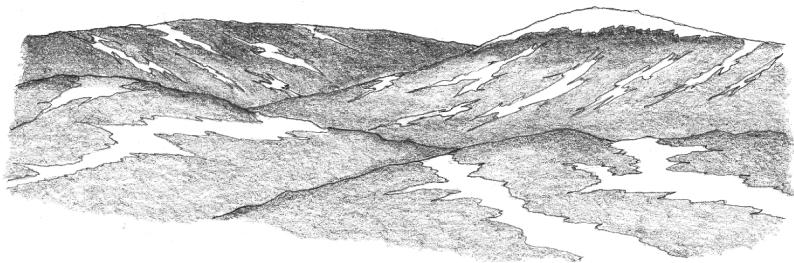
need to witness the rising and setting of the suns. The Maturi leads them in these rituals and I have found myself being drawn to the singing that accompanies them. It is both moving and saddening in a way, the product of generations of toil and despair that I do not think will be forgotten easily. From what I have been able to find out from Faren it is possible that their customs have grown from the ancient beliefs surrounding the Gaels. Whether this might be so is a question I cannot answer, but the affinity the Dwarvendim have with stone, and the way they celebrate this in their customs, makes me wonder if they are not the custodians of an ancient knowledge of their own, one that has survived the rigours of their slavery.

Apart from my observations of the people who work around me I find that I have little to do. None can go below without risking illness and apart from minor ailments amongst those still on deck the Healer's Assistants find themselves idle, captive like all others to the lack of wind and the steady encroachment of the tremoring illness.

*D*ay One hundred

Another fourteen people have been sent below, and from communications we have learned that the first patient has succumbed to the affliction, passing away in the early hours of the morning. We have no answers to give those who ask what can be done, and the Healer Faren has spent most of the morning in a dire meeting with the Captain and his Officers. Anxiety, and the steady frustration of remaining becalmed in the midst of an unknown sea, has begun to fray edges that otherwise would remain steady. Fights have broken out over the most trivial of matters and the Officer of the Watch has been given cause to increase the number of men he has on patrol upon the decks. I fear that we may be heading towards a most inglorious of Dooms, one for which the Dromannion is not deserving.

As I write I feel the stress of our circumstances laying heavily upon me. My back hurts and I find it difficult to hold my quill to paper. Perhaps I should rest.



Day One hundred and twenty-three

I have been told that it is now day One hundred and twenty-three of our voyage but I can remember little of the events of the past three weeks. The ship is in uproar and although I feel both weak and a little confused I have been trying to make sense of what is happening around me. As I now write Stump is barricaded within the walls of the crew quarters in the forecastle, and for reasons that will be recounted is being stoutly protected by the Dwarvendim, who will let none pass its heavy, iron-strapped doors. There appears to be no sign of the tremoring illness amongst the passengers of the Dromannion but a fear has replaced its insidious grip, one that is squarely directed at the northerner and those who are protecting him. The Healer Faren is nowhere to be found and I can get no sense from any of the other Healer's Assistant as to what has occurred.

In the evening of this day the Dwarvendim Lanja Narris came to my quarters within the Well and took the time to speak with me. Although I have had the opportunity to walk around below decks the stand-off upon the foredeck has not allowed me the opportunity to see what has been going on. Her words have cleared some of the fog from my memories, and it would seem that both myself and Faren are in some amount of trouble. It did not take long for me to see why.

In the quiet of the Capstan Well Lanja Narris recounted all that had occurred since my last entry to my journal. Although I have no recollection of it, I fell victim to the tremoring in the late evening and with the help of two other passengers was taken below to be tended by Stump and the Dwarvendim. Like the rest of the afflicted aboard I fell quickly into unconsciousness and remained in such a state for

more than two weeks. For those caring for the sick it was a desperate time, the numbers of sick growing with every day until even the steerage deck was not large enough to house all who needed attention.

It was on the sixteenth day of the outbreak that the quarantine decks were opened up to the afflicteds' relatives. It had become a pointless exercise in keeping the sick quarantined as only the Dwarvendim and a handful of the crew remained unaffected. In such dire circumstances the Dromannion had become a Plague Ship, and in that condition was without hope until the disease had run its course. It was only then that Stump revealed his true identity.

For Lanja Narris it was no surprise, the Dwarvendim had recognised the northerner for his true nature immediately but had kept such knowledge to themselves. I can record here that apart from Faren it came as quite a shock to the rest of the Dromannion's complement.

At dusk on the One hundred and twenty-first day of our voyage the Dromannion lay becalmed with the rest of the Fleet, and with a number of the Dwarvendim in attendance Shalengael stood in the midst of the sick and dying and worked his power in full view of all. Without explanation or warning he began a low chant, almost a whisper that took hold of the air about him as he worked his powers. In the gathering dark a blue aura formed about his body which quickly expanded across the decks, working its way down hatchways and corridors, finding the afflicted and locking them in a tight grasp. Many struggled to break free, but most were too ill to give any resistance and quickly the ship became enmeshed in the glow of the northerner's magic.

I do not remember it but the expulsion of the disease from each afflicted soul came as a joining of colour and pain. On the mid-deck Shalengael wove his power, high winds arising from each point of the compass, coming together above the Dromannion in a column of rotating air that spun overhead with such force that the ship begun to turn slowly in the water. For a purpose known only to the northerner the vortex remained aloft and then reached down towards the ship itself. From its centre emerged a brilliant blue light that lit up the sea, outlining the ship as clearly as daylight, before descending swiftly below decks.

From every deck came the cries of the sick. In a tumult of rising agonies the tremoring disease flowed from the chest of each affected soul, a sickly orange mist that swirled about each of its victims before being quickly absorbed by the ever-growing power of the blue light. Before any person aboard the ship could move to respond the magic unleashed by Shalengael filled the Dromannion and then winked out. Within the decks and holds of the ship the sick rose from their beds and sleeping places unable to fathom the nature of their deliverance. Those that had been caring for the sick stood in amazement as their charges awoke from their unconsciousness and began to recover their senses. For some however, it was too late. Amongst the many that had been saved from death lay those for who the sudden cure would give no comfort. The rigours of the blue light had proved too much for their frailty. Hundreds had been saved but thirty-six had died, and in the confusion and grief Shalengael was blamed.

It is the contention of Lanja Narris that no-one apart from Faren, myself and the Dwarvendim knew of Stump's true identity. The violence that followed arose not from an irrational fear of the Gaels but from the grief of so many dead, and of a rumour that spread quickly as to his culpability. It is a sad fact of our humanity that we sometimes allow ourselves to be so easily swayed by our fear of the unknown. Within minutes an armed gang had arisen from the depths of the ship to find the northerner and throw him overboard. Somehow the fact that Shalengael (and from this point onwards I shall refer to him only by that name) had saved them all had been lost in the uncertainty of the moment. It was thankfully a moment of violence short-lived.

Captain Duschet and his Officers were all recovering below when the mob emerged above deck. The ordered discipline of the ship had broken down as soon as the Captain himself had taken ill. I am sure that those involved must have thought it an easy matter to find the northerner and dispatch him quietly overboard. Such was not the case. To greet them upon the mid-deck stood a party of Dwarvendim, both men and women. All carried weapons and did not wait for the mob to fully assemble upon the upper deck before attacking them. The melee that followed was both short and decisive. None of the Dwarvendim had been lessened by the tremoring and they had committed themselves to ensuring that nothing should happen to

Shalengael. In a flurry of clubs and fists the mob was violently suppressed and thrown back down below decks. Until Captain Duschet returned to the wheeldeck the Dwarvendim held control of the ship and so it remained until he did.

On this twenty-third day of our becalming the situation above decks remains tense. Many still blame Shalengael for the loss of life, and as a consequence of that animosity the Dwarvendim have held the forecastle as a stronghold where the northerner remains under their protection. Nobody has attempted any further harm to the man but the Dwarvendim have not faltered in their diligence. It will require considerable negotiation to bring peace back to our ship.

Day One hundred and twenty-four

Like many of my brethren aboard ship I have not yet been able to return to duty. The effects of the tremoring disease have lingered in those who were worst afflicted and I have been told that it will be at least three days until I will be fit enough to return to my work. The stand-off continues in the forecastle but earnest talks have begun between the Captain and the Maturi Hedj. The Dwarvendim are demanding that Shalengael be left to continue the voyage unshackled by the threat of harm, but the Captain has not yet agreed to this. He has put forward the stance that he has nothing against the northerner, however such a man cannot be left to freely wander the ship. In his mind he would be unable to vouch for his safety. It is a disagreement that continues.

The weather remains calm, without wind or respite from the monotony of a languid sea. Apart from the obvious presence of the Dwarvendim guarding the entrance to the forecastle the ship has returned to a semblance of normality. The crew are taking the opportunity given to do repairs to the sails and paint the rigging with tar. The sailmakers have been busy pulling new sailcloth from the aft holds and a hive of industry has sprung up upon the mid-deck as many hands are brought to the task of making the repairs. It is surprising how large some of the sails are, and after the rigours of our journey most need a great deal of attention.

This afternoon I was able to see the Healer Faren. Although I am not yet strong enough to work I have been able to move about the ship, and in doing so found the Healer within his quarters. He has been placed under house arrest as a token punishment for withholding his knowledge of the identity of Shalengael, but due to his position takes no notice of the restriction. He is in constant need throughout the ship, by both those who need his care and by his Assistants who need his advice. I was lucky to find him and was able to gain a moment to talk.

For all that has happened he has no doubt we did the right thing. The powers demonstrated by the northerner proved the saving of the ship's complement and to have uncovered him at any earlier time could only have led to the same outcome. The level of his abilities had surprised the Healer however, and he had asked Shalengael soon after the event why he had waited until such a dire situation had been reached. The answer was a hint as to the true power the man had at his command.

Shalengael had explained that the extent of the power wielded by the Gaels lay proportional to the nature of the problem that needed to be solved. A small problem was met with a small response and that same response could not be used again quickly. If only a few people had been affected then he could have done something without bringing undue attention to himself. Because the disease had spread with such speed he could do nothing but wait until it had afflicted everyone, even if it meant some would have to die. It was only when the disease had taken hold of all who could be infected that he could then use his power to heal all at the one stroke. In his own words he put forward the observation that with the power of the Gaels it is as easy to move a mountain as it is to lift a cup from a table. The only restriction lies in that he cannot do it again quickly.

From my talk with Faren it appears that I have also been censured by the Captain and his Officers. My part in the secrecy of Shalengael's identity has not gone unreported, and I too shall have to take whatever sanction is to be metered to me. At this time I still feel too fatigued to care, but I have little doubt I will eventually be brought before the Captain for discipline. It should be an interesting meeting.

*D*ay One hundred and twenty-five

I have spent this day in idle wandering, watching the crew mending the sails and spending some time as the forward watch. Such a task requires little beyond the diligence to watch the waves before the ship and give cry to any approaching danger. We still have no wind so there is little ahead that can be reported on. The current carries us westwards and it has been noted that the colour of the waters have changed. It is a sign that the sea is becoming shallower, and as a precaution regular soundings are being taken to avoid an unwelcome grounding.

Apart from the companionship of the sounding detail I have been able to spend most of this afternoon alone, staring into the wash of the sea and seeing only the occasional sea-bird, or the fleeting sign of a creature moving quietly beneath the surface. Although I must pass the Dwarvendim in order to reach the forward watch they have paid me no heed. The forecastle has no entry except through the doors that face the foredeck and I made sure that I gave no cause to earn their attention.

With the lack of wind most of the Fleet has slowly moved closer together and from my position at the bow of the Dromannion I have a clear view of the vessels arrayed on all sides. They stand as a ragged collection of vessels, ships of all size and purpose, crowded with those who chose to leave our distant homes and flee into the uncertainty of the open sea. Like the Dromannion, most have taken the pause in our voyage to do much needed repair, and some have even seen the welcome laying of new paint and the shine of polished metal. It would appear that there have been few idle hands as we have remained captive to the doldrums.

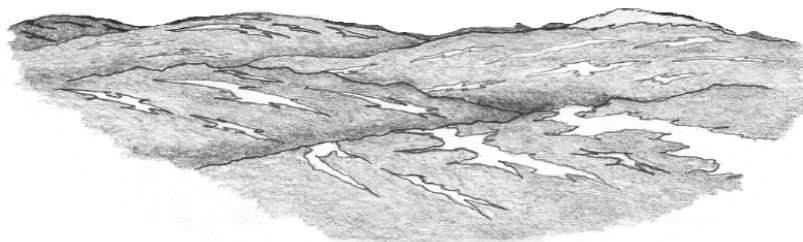
The Equinox remains at the forefront, and although it stands as no more than a speck against the undisturbed line of the horizon, it is the furthest extent of our influence in the world. I have heard nothing from anyone for some time of the lives that we have left behind. It is strange but it seems to me that we have all taken the memories of where we have come from and placed them away in some safe storage, out of sight and out of mind. Our attention instead is focused

*on the struggles of the day and the promise of a new land in the west.
If only the wind would raise itself we could once again get under way.*

Day One hundred and twenty-eight

Finally I have been allowed to return to work. At the break of dawn I was awakened by Ahlek and asked to report to the Healer's rooms. There I had to undergo a complete physical by Faren before being given permission to return to my duties as an Assistant. There is much to do and in a ship divided I have found myself tending the medical needs of those who come for help, and trying to dispel the rumours that still circulate the ship. It is good to be of use once again.

In the mid-afternoon I was called to the Captain's rooms and along with Faren received the terms of the punishment I had been fully expecting. Captain Duschet commands his ship with a firm hand, and in the few minutes that we had with him he made sure that we maintained no doubt as to his displeasure on our secrecy regarding Shalengael. Neither of us offered any reasoning for our decision, there was no point. A ship at sea has only one authority and there was nothing we could say that might relieve us of the burden of our actions. As for my part I am to be punished with additional duties. It is my lot that for the next fortnight I am to perform the dogwatch upon the mainmast. This entails four hours per day, at the change of each watch, maintaining vigil from the mainmast crowsnest. It does not seem an oppressive duty but I have had the odd smile from some of the crew as to what it really means. I guess only time will show me what I am in for.



*D*ay One hundred and twenty-nine

Today the wind has returned to breathe life into our ships, and finally we are no longer at the mercy of the currents. From the south-east we have received a hard bluster that has filled our sails and sent us racing for the north-west. It is certainly not before time. For twenty-nine days we have been becalmed and in that time we have drifted many leagues to the west. From our soundings it is apparent that the sea is shallowing and as a consequence we have been forced to track more to the north. As a precaution the Equinox leads the way, testing the waters for the possibility of sandbars and hidden reefs.

Today is also the first day of my duty as a member of the dogwatch. I have learned quickly that it is not a task for which I am suited, and in that knowledge have come to appreciate those who must spend their time high in the sails and shrouds of this ship.

The crowsnest is a wide, fenced platform some thirty-five metres above the mid-deck. Although it appears as a small perch when viewed from the decking it is actually large enough to accommodate four crew without difficulty. It was to my benefit that I found myself assigned to the watch with three other hands, two of which I had previously treated for minor injuries. With their help I was shown how to ascend the mast ladder with safety and how to tether myself correctly once we were in the nest. It was an arduous climb for one such as myself, the ascent taking a good twenty minutes to achieve. What I found upon reaching the platform was both marvellous and gut-wrenching.

Arrayed upon a grey-shaded sea lay the Fleet, all under sail and moving with haste before the wind. Dozens of vessels pitched in the rising waters, sails straining under the force of the bluster. It was a wonderful sight, one that could be taken full advantage of, if not for the sickening and unrelenting movement of the crowsnest itself. I had believed prior to this duty that I had found my sea-legs, but what I had become used to standing upon the decks of the Dromannion could not prepare me for the yawning heave of the mast. Every pitch and roll of the ship below was magnified four-fold upon the nest. Quickly I lost most of what I have eaten in the last two days and fell

into a solid sense of unease that I could not shake. With the strengthening of the wind the sickness became worse, and without any hope of leaving my post I resigned myself to the unpredictable thrashing of the platform beneath me.

It was a crewman by the name of Michals who came to my rescue. Out of a fog of desperate unease he handed me a small piece of blackroot. I did not notice it until he held it directly beneath my nose and it took only a small sniff of its pungent fumes to realise that it would quell a stomach heaving as much as the sea below. I took it and stuffed it into my mouth. You cannot swallow blackroot, it is a root best chewed and then discarded, but in a matter of seconds it began to cut through the disorientation and nausea, settling my stomach and clearing my head. I cannot say how much I appreciated such a simple gesture of help. At that moment I thought the man had saved my life.

By the end of the dogwatch I had recovered enough to be of some small help to the others sharing my duty. By then the wind had grown into a strong gale, and as we scanned the waters beneath the four quarters of the ship I was able to watch as the crew furled sail, trimming the ship for the gathering weather at our heels. I can report that in my time aloft I have seen Krel in the north, and the dark line of advancing rain-clouds in the east. There is a storm in our wake and it rises swifter than we will be able to run from its cold embrace.

Day One hundred and thirty-three

For four days now storms have buffeted the Fleet, scattering us widely as the gales drive our ships forward into an uncertain sea. We have run before the tempest, driven into the west by rain and the continuous bluster of the storm. The Dromannion rides the waves easily but our way ahead is unsure. The Equinox has not been seen since the storms began and the Captain is loathe to be pushed too much further westwards. The possibility of shallow seas has been met by an extra watch at the bow and what soundings that can be done in such rough weather. It is said that we may have to ride the storm and then wait for the return of the scout-ship.

The storm rages but our duties continue, the needs of the Dromannion a constant obligation that cannot be ignored. Below, the decks are a melee of activity and within this throng myself and the other Assistants go about our allotted tasks. There has been no return of the tremoring disease and strangely little else in the way of infection or affliction. Shalengael's magic has quelled more than just the focus of its creation, and for the moment we spend our time attending to the many lesser injuries that arise through either accident or misadventure.

I have been unable to continue with my punishment aloft in the crownsnest. The weather has ensured that this duty will have to wait for finer skies. Before the forecastle there has been no change. The Dwarvendim guard the northerner from all who might wish him harm, and as of yet no agreement has been reached as to how this impasse will be resolved.

Day One hundred and thirty-four

The storm has passed and on the evening of this day the Fleet rides the sea at anchor, awaiting the return of the Equinox. Soundings now show the waters to be dangerously shallow and until the scout-ship reports back we are to go no further westwards. I can report however, that there has been a resolution to Shalengael's predicament. In the days that have followed the unveiling of the northerner tempers have cooled, and I believe many have come to realise the necessity of what was done, and of the lives he saved. At midday the Captain and his First Officer made for the forecastle and there spoke with the Maturi and those of the Dwarvendim who had served as Shalengael's guards. From this meeting it has been decided that the northerner shall be afforded the protection of the Captain, and that four of the Dwarvendim will be assigned to Shalengael as personal guards, to discretely watch over him. He will be allowed a full run of the ship but will not be able to return to his duties as a Healer's Assistant. The Captain has determined that a man of such power must be kept close, and to do so has made him an adviser for the remainder of our voyage. Shalengael for his part has agreed to only exercise his power with the permission of the Captain. I am glad to report that with such terms everyone seems happy.

Day One hundred and Thirty-five

The Equinox has not yet been sighted and because of this we remain at anchor. The sky has turned to a clear vault of blue and only faint wisps of cloud streak the eastern horizon. There have been further sightings of Kreel in the north and, more disturbingly, of a Behemoth moving upon the perimeter of the Fleet. I have spent two watches aloft and can now say that I am beginning to adjust to the exaggerated movement of the crowsnest. In such fine weather the view from the topmast extends to all the horizons and our watch has been busy because of it. The Kreel move constantly in the north, small dark shapes that appear from the east and then are lost in the haze of the horizon. The other crew on my watch have said that they have seen many of the creatures flying to some destination further westwards, and that it does not bode well for our own goal of finding the Midreach.

Of greater immediate threat has been the ominous presence of a Behemoth upon our borders. It was spotted at first light and has been in view for most of the day, nothing but an enormous patch of shadow slipping silently beneath the waters. The ships of the Fleet rest at anchor but the beast has not attacked. It appears to be hindered by the shallow sea and instead has been content to remain out of the range of our ballistas. It does not approach too close to our position and has kept to the east where the water is deeper. It is my hope that the creature will continue to keep its distance.

With the resolution of the conflict between the Dwarvendim and the rest of the Dromannion life has returned quickly to its well-practised routine. Shalengael has been given quarters on the wheeldeck near the Captain's, and because of this will be afforded a measure of protection. No-one is allowed access to the wheeldeck unless they are Officers of the Ship or asked to report there. The Dwarvendim seem content with the situation and have returned to their duties as well. It is good to see the ship once again without conflict.

*D*ay One hundred and thirty-six

In the quiet hours of the night I have been visited again with dreams and visions, and this time I am not alone. The break of day has seen a growing murmur through the ship of occurrences in the night and an experience that has been shared by many in the dark hours. The same dream has been reported all over the ship, from the Captain himself down to the lowest rating aboard, and it has caused a stir that has again settled accusation and fear against the Gael. None can explain why this has happened, but it would appear that only those of us who have been touched by Shalengael's power experienced the vision. For many it has been an experience unlooked for and unwelcome.

Shalengael has kept out of sight but the power of the shared dream has given the Captain cause to have all the Ballistas manned permanently. We all now live with an irrational certainty that there lies ahead a great danger, the clarity and undeniable malevolence of the vision too pressing to ignore. For future reference I will record it here. It will be to the future that we must look to determine whether there is any truth to it.

I went to bed late on the previous evening. As has been the case on so many occasions, an injury above decks had kept me out of my hammock far beyond the striking of midnight. Exhausted I had fallen into my swinging bed and had quickly fallen asleep. It was there that the vision unfolded.

Under the expanse of a clear and moonless night the Dromannion sailed effortlessly through a sea as still and as quiet as a pond. No moons rode the heavens and in the silence the stars shone brightly, the barest glimmer reflecting back from the surface of a fathomless sea. Upon its decks I again stood alone, watching as the huge ship moved quietly through the water, navigating a path into the black of the night. Then from the horizon ahead came the first hints of a thunderstorm, a faint flashing of light in the darkness that sent the murmur of distant thunder rolling past the ship. Closer the Dromannion edged towards the storm and as it did so the seas rose up in huge waves that hammered at the sides of the vessel and tore at the unintended sails.

Although I knew I was dreaming I was unable to rouse myself. Within the tumult of the rising storm I found myself no longer a spectator somehow apart from what was happening. Within my thoughts I felt myself being compelled to action, running for the wheeldeck and taking control of the helm as the Dromannion battled against the power of the approaching tempest.

Quickly huge spires of stone began to appear at all sides of the ship and again I could feel the presence of malevolent eyes peering down from on high, waiting for a moment to strike out at the ship and bring it crashing into the sea. Desperately I fought for control of the wheel, but before I could turn the ship about huge creatures began descending to the decks, tearing into the Dromannion's timbers and shredding her sails. It was only then that I saw the creatures were Krel, and that the largest of them had settled upon the mainmast. In the starlight it was a massive shadow, perched halfway up the mast, screeching encouragement to its brethren as they destroyed the ship. In the violence of this attack I could do nothing.

I remember clearly as I sprang awake, a sweat soaking my clothes, that the last thing I saw was the bow of the Dromannion splintering against a tall tower of stone, its timbers breaking and twisting against the solid rock as the ship drove into it. The sound of its demise echoes in my head even as I write this, and for all who have experienced the vision it is something that will not be easily forgotten.

As a response to the shared nightmare the Captain has determined not to move forward until the Equinox has returned. The writings of Caren'thal the Younger give little information as to what we will be confronted with at the Midreach and Duschet will take no chances on his ship. At this time it is felt that caution is our best defence.

*D*ay One hundred and thirty-eight

At first light this morning the Equinox appeared upon the horizon to the north-west. Most of the morning passed as we waited for it to reach the Dromannion's position, and with her arrival comes news of sand-bars and treacherous waters ahead. From Faren I have heard that the Equinox has spent six days sounding the shoals and trying to

find a way through. Of the Midreach Islands the scout-ship can report a sighting of land in the north-west and with this news Captain Duschet has issued new directions to the Fleet. We are to sail north until we find deep waters and then veer to the north-west. In that direction we should find the Midreach, and the islands of Clan'dael.

It is to our fortune that a fair wind blows at our back and with such a breeze we have hauled anchor and now tack to the north, the Dromannion at full sail, the Fleet spread about us as we go. Our goal now lies to the north-west, the Islands of the Midreach our next port of call. I can report that we remain well provisioned, our water supply not yet depleted by the length of our capture within the doldrums. Spirits remain high but we all sense the anticipation of seeing land once again. If what is said about the islands is true we should find a fair harbour, and good lands in which to replenish our stocks of fresh food. Talk is also being made of replacing the lost foremast, but none of us can know what the islands will be able to provide and such comment is mere speculation.

On this day we have had no further sightings of the Krel, however a Behemoth remains upon our starboard, tracking the Fleet as we turn northwards. It keeps at a distance but the slow undulations of its form upon the surface of the waves marks its position clearly. The Captain has ordered the ballistas loaded and ready for any attack that may come.

Day One hundred and thirty-nine

This morning has seen the return of a clouded sky, the wind rising to a brisk bluster that pushes us ever faster to the north. My duties for the moment are complete and I now have the time to rest prior to my watch upon the crowsnest. The punishment handed to me by the Captain had proved onerous to begin with, but within this past week I have found myself looking forward to the time spent aloft. On most watches I am joined by three other crewmembers, most of them men that I have had some contact with over the course of our voyage. Apart from the duties of the watch we spend most of the time in conversation and it has proven an excellent opportunity to discuss all that has happened aboard ship. Those discussions have given me

insight into the rumours and undercurrents that permeate the Dromannion, and I have come to realise that for many people aboard ship the ultimate goals of our voyage are the subject of much argument and disagreement.

It has only been through these discussions that I have discovered that many of our number do not wish to voyage any further than we have to. For myself and most that I work with there is only one objective, the New World and the promise it holds for a new life. But for some of my fellow shipmates the prospect of more months at sea is a torment they do not wish to endure any further. The crowded conditions and the ever-present dangers of the sea have worn down their resolve, and many have said that the first landfall that offers them a chance of survival will be good enough for them.

For me it is a surprising point of view, but I can see why it might be a possibility for some. We have never been a seafaring people and if this is their choice then there is little that could be done about it. I see now why the prospect of the Midreach Islands has been so eagerly received below decks. It will be interesting to see whether the islands meet the expectations of those who might wish to disembark.

The bells have been rung for the dogwatch. There is more that I wish to write but it will have to wait.

Day One hundred and forty

Today has been a day of violence and death. In the calm of dusk a Behemoth once again attacked the Fleet, using the blinding light of sunset to mask its advance upon our vessels from the west. I cannot say whether it is the same creature that we drove off before, but it attacked with a vengeance and in its wake we have lost two ships and more than eighty souls.

The first sign of trouble came from the forward watch in the hour before dusk. The beast had not been sighted for most of the day but in the waning light the clear black outline of its ridged spine lay unmistakable against the waves to port. For a short time it stood its ground, just out of range of our weapons, before disappearing back

into the depths. In the glare of sunset all hands scanned the sea, looking for any further sign of its approach. We did not see it again until it rose from the depths in a surge of water, breaching upwards before crashing back down into the sea.

The Tarental, a vessel lying at the edge of the Fleet, took the full brunt of the creature's wake, a high wall of water that hit the ship broadside and crushed it as if it were matchwood, throwing it on its back. Immediately ships turned for the scene of the disaster but not before the Behemoth rose again, this time breaching beneath the Arathindas, breaking the cutter's back in an explosion of wood and sail.

Before the Behemoth could hit water once again the Dromannion opened fire with every ballista that could be brought to bear upon it. At our back the Avernell also opened fire and in the tracery of speeding bolts the creature was lit up by detonations that tore pieces from its enormous flanks. Against the ferocity of the attack there was little else that could be done. Or so I thought.

From the forecastle armoury a large device was rolled from behind closed doors and quickly moved to the edge of the foredeck, before being placed into a curious cradle that had been installed unobtrusively almost a week before. The device was a barrel, no bigger than one that could be lifted by a single man, but it was obviously made entirely of black metal and had a small square protuberance upon its upper surface. A fuse hung limp from this square box and without hesitation a crew member lit it and then the entire device was rolled from its cradle over the side of the ship and into the rushing sea.

Orders came fast from the Captain and the Dromannion lurched forward as more sail was loosed to catch a growing wind. Another of the devices was rolled out, lit and then rolled into the water. I had no idea what they might be for, but as the second charge fell from its cradle a great explosion lifted the sea behind us, throwing a vast column of water into the air.

To this the Behemoth answered, breaching at our rear, lifting its black and grey form high as its massive bulk turned in the air. In a confusion of churning water it fell back and then rose again closer to

the ship. Its intention was clear, it had singled us out as its next victim and in a thrashing charge it raced for the ship. A second explosion followed, and I felt the Dromannion lift beneath my feet from the detonation somewhere in the depths below. As water once again leapt into the air the Captain called for more of the charges and a third barrel fell into the sea. This barrel had a much shorter fuse and detonated only a ship's length behind our fleeting vessel. This explosion keeled the Dromannion sideways, throwing us all to the decks, but this time its effects were lethal. No plume of water rose from its detonation, instead the sea bowed upwards, bubbling and frothing as if the waves themselves were in torment. Out of the depths the Behemoth breached once again but this time it fell sideways, a gaping hole in its side. Mortally wounded it crashed into the waves and then sank slowly out of sight.

Jubilation erupted aboard ship, crew and passengers cheering as the mangled remains of the great creature slipped beneath the surface. I can record here that the Captain himself looked well pleased but the excitement could only be momentary. At our rear lay the survivors of two smashed ships and swiftly the Dromannion turned to give assistance.

It took more than an hour to return to the scene of the sinkings. It was dark and by that time the Avernell was within a floating field of debris, illuminated by the lanterns of lifeboats as they searched the flotsam. The Avernell's flags gave us the worst of news. There were no survivors.

Once again we have been visited by tragedy and once more we have no time to grieve for the dead. Innocent men and women have died this day but we cannot wait to give proper rights or reflect on what we have lost. We must continue on.

*D*ay One hundred and forty-one

The winds that have sped us northwards have now swung into the east and the Fleet pounds against a rising swell, the sea about us a vista of white-capped waves and wind-borne spray. There is weather once again advancing towards us but there are signs that the islands of the Midreach lie somewhere close, just beyond the western horizon.

We have found deep water and in that dark water the current now flows to the north, a sure sign that land is near. All over the ship the anticipation of a new landfall is growing. Plans are now in preparation for what we must achieve once we have found safe harbour and this time our expectations are far different from those of Amen'wraith.

Unlike the paradise of Laerion the Midreach Islands hold no restrictions. Whether we will find food and water is unknown, but none of the writings of Caren'thal mention any dangers for which we must be mindful. Of that which is remembered of the adventurer's journey the most important fact lies in the nature of the eastern coastline of all the islands. High cliffs and rocky beaches do not allow a suitable anchorage for a Fleet of our size on the east shoreline. The only harbours are to be found on the western shores of the three largest islands, named by Caren'thal the Younger as Clan'dael. Here it is said we will find sloping lands and gentle plains, edged along the northern borders by mountains and undulating hills. For a people so long at sea such a prospect grips us with its anticipation.

Apart from these facts there is little else known. From the exploration of the shoals by the Equinox it is apparent that shallow seas can be found all the way to the southern edge of the Midreach. To gain the western shoreline of Clan'dael we will need to survey the coast of these rocky outcrops until a way can be found through. Captain Duschet has determined that a scouting party of three ships is to be sent into the west to find the way. The Fleet will move slowly westwards and rendezvous with the scouts upon their return. This job has been given to the Equinox, the Garenmor and the Longreach. With their shallow draughts these ships are best suited for the task, and at midday were sent westwards into the rising swell.

For my part I look forward to the chance to once again place feet upon dry ground. It seems that we have been aboard ship for so long that it becomes difficult to remember the feeling of a solid footing that does not move beneath you. According to the maps provided by the Maturi Hedj the Midreach is the last chance for restocking and repair prior to setting course for the New World. It is an opportunity we shall all take advantage of.

After some research I have found out more regarding the barrel charges that were used so effectively against the Behemoth. Much has been rumoured on their origin but I can record that the devices were the work of our blacksmith, an energetic man by the name of Garren Namawe. He had been asked by the First Officer to consider a weapon that might be used against the sea-creatures, and had used a story he had heard in his youth about fish-poaching as his inspiration. On a smaller scale poachers operating within the lakes and forests of his home had used black-powder devices to stun fish. With the idea in mind he had built the charges to a size that would deter the beasts from following the Fleet.

The fuse proved the most difficult to manufacture but was made possible with the knowledge of the Dwarvendim. As slaves to the Haarn there had been need to use powder charges that could be placed in submerged mine shafts and passageways. The same techniques had been used to detonate the barrel charges to such devastating effect against the beast, and recognition of the Dwarvendim's involvement has increased their standing aboard ship considerably. Any hard feelings that might have remained from their defence of Shalengael has been pushed aside. Namawe now enjoys a level of respect that I believe he feels uncomfortable with, however it pleases me greatly that the Fleet now has an effective defence against the Behemoths, and in the fashioning of that defence the Dromannion is once again united.

Although it has been decided that we will not be attempting to find a passage to the west coast of Clan'dael until the return of the scoutships, there is no benefit to be gained by remaining at anchor. The Fleet has been ordered to change course for the Midreach, but in doing so will remain a full day behind the scouts. Already most vessels have hauled in sail, and now move westwards at a much reduced pace. It will be left to the skill of the Equinox's captain to find a way beyond the shoals and rocky islands of the Midreach.

Day One hundred and forty-two

The orderly routine of the ship continues, life aboard an ongoing cycle of work and those few moments of rest that can be obtained between

duties. I have found in the last few days that I have spent most of my time with the NomDruse, part of a concerted effort to coax them from the isolation of their Cresh and give them the opportunity to mingle with the rest of the passengers and crew. As has proven the case previously the children remain intransigent, keeping to themselves and refusing to go above decks except for the shortest of times. The Healer Faren has determined that they are in need of fresh air, some sun upon their skin, and not a little exercise. With the help of those that care for them I have been attempting to get the older children to go topside but it has only been with the appearance of Shalengael that we have made any progress.

I found him within the quarters of the NomDruse at the change of the watch this morning. To my surprise he was still dressed in the white robes of a healer, but now made no pretension to hide his true identity. Across the arms and down both sides of his cloak were now displayed a curious array of elaborate lettering sown in blue cotton. I cannot say that I know their purpose, but it did strike me that I recognised some of the symbols from the books that he had taken from the library at Corin'kraag.

When I stepped into the Cresh the northerner was on one knee talking earnestly with some of the older children. It was true that the children had been up on deck on a few occasions but had not done so for some time. All agreed that the NomDruse needed to become an active part of the ship's complement, and to that end Shalengael worked to break down the reticence they seemed to have developed for doing so.

When the northerner saw me he raised himself and extended a hand in greeting. Although I have worked alongside the man for some months in his guise as Stump it was a strange feeling nonetheless to greet him once again after the troubles caused by his uncovering. I spoke with him at some length over the concerns held for the NomDruse children before turning the conversation to himself.

It seems apparent that Shalengael has found himself a place by the side of the Captain and the Maturi Hedj. Of all the men who lead our Fleet to the New World he is the most personally powerful and I can understand why the Captain has decided to keep him close. For his

part he seems unconcerned about his own personal safety and instead asked questions regarding the well-being of the other Healer's Assistants and if there had been any continuing effects from his cure of the tremoring disease. Such questions I answered truthfully and it was only as our conversation again turned to the children that I thanked him for my own cure. He had after all saved my life as well as the lives of hundreds of other souls on the ship.

To this the tall northerner smiled and raised a finger as if to rebuke me. There was, he said quietly, one matter that he needed to raise with me. And it was something for which he needed to express thanks. It was known to him that myself and Faren had discovered his true identity early in the voyage and he expressed his gratitude for the discretion we had shown in keeping it to ourselves. Furthermore he considered that as we had suffered sanctions for that silence he had a debt to repay, and it was to be a payment that would be provided in due course. I can say truthfully that I felt no debt. The man had saved me from the tremoring, but in his mind that was simply a consequence of a much larger action which had not been directed at me personally. He would not say what the repayment might be but I could sense clearly that I was someone he trusted.

After a further period of time with the NomDruse Shalengael left, his four bodyguards close at his heels. His counsel had been well received amongst the children and I can record here that most have spent the afternoon on deck, taking in the air and enjoying the spectacle of a Shurdu game as it played itself out amidships.

Somewhere ahead lies the Midreach. I can smell it on the air.

Day One hundred and forty-three

Today we have seen Kreele once again in the north and west. Unlike previous sightings the creatures can be seen circling ahead in great flocks, riding the currents as they glide in wide spirals as if searching for something. The Maturi is adamant that the reptiles are not dangerous as long as we do not disturb them, but for those of us who witnessed their malevolence in the ruins of Corin'kraag it is a difficult idea to accept. However, the Captain will take no chances and has maintained fire-crews at each of the ballistas.

I continue my punishment upon the crownsnest, and use the time to talk with those who share the duty with me, and observe the general business of the ship as it unfolds beneath my feet. On this day the dogwatch began in the early evening, and along with my fellow crewmates I settled down for the duration of our watch. In the weakening light we talked, watching as the stars began their slow emergence from the shadows of dusk. It is true that there are many things that can be seen at sea. If you look hard enough it is not just water and sky, an unchanging wasteland of undulating waves and parading cloud. For those who must spend their days at its side the sea becomes a creature of mood and colour that changes with each passing hour, alive in its depths with life and movement. In the dark of night however, it takes on a whole new perspective. Just as it has on this night.

The first sign of anything unusual came three hours into our watch. It was well into the night hours and as of yet the twin moons had not risen. Cloud had been moving in from the eastern horizon and deep within its folds we could see lightning forking in glaring blasts. It is a curious thing to see lightning and yet not hear the thunder that accompanies it. The storm was too far away for the sound of its blasts to be heard but the lightning itself lit up the cloudbank, silhouetting the anvil-heads in their own light, momentarily forcing everything else in the world to hide in their shadows. We watched the show for some time, tracking the storm as it moved closer and then veered southwards. At least this would be one tempest we would not have to endure. It was then that the starboard watchman called us to his side.

In the water, some two hundred metres from our mid-deck lay a wide patch of light, beneath the sea's surface but glowing bright enough to shine upwards with a blue-green hue. In extent it spread for about two ship-lengths of the Dromannion and appeared as a collection of smaller lights that moved constantly within the wider conglomeration. I looked to the other crewmen to ask what it might be, but the looks on their faces told me that they had never seen it before either.

As we watched the patch began to move, keeping pace with our ship before spreading outwards, breaking into smaller pieces that began to move independently around the ships that sailed nearest. These lights were then joined by others that moved purposefully from all directions, but which seemed to be rising out the depths beneath us.

Quickly a call was made below and soon the decks were crowded with people watching as the lights began to circle the ship. There seemed to be no danger in it and the glowing patches persisted for some time before disappearing into the sea as might lanterns being carried into a thick fog. I cannot say what it was, however it would be easy to believe that this apparition is connected to the sighting I made previously. Now there can be no doubt that something is down there. I cannot think what it might be though.

Day One hundred and forty-four

At the striking of the first bell after sunrise this morning the first peaks of the Midreach peered from the western horizon. Grey against the deep blue of the dawn they march across the dividing line between sea and sky as a set of jagged teeth, a grim foretaste of what might lay ahead. As has been prearranged between the Captains of the Fleet, all ships have come to a stop, furling sail and laying out sea-anchors as we now wait for the return of the Equinox and its sister-ships.

On the stroke of each hour a flare is being sent into the sky, a visible signpost of our position to our scouts. All we can now do is await their return.

Day One hundred and forty-five

The day has passed without sight of the Equinox. Aboard ship we go about our duties as usual but all eyes are cast to the west as we wait for some sign of flare or sail. Overhead I have seen Kreel, and large flocks of birds circling upon the winds. The weather has remained clear, only a light breeze ruffling our sails as we lay at anchor. It is a hard wait to endure and I have seen signs amongst some of our complement that it is becoming a point of contention between them. For the moment though we can do naught but continue with our routine and hope we shall meet with the Equinox soon.

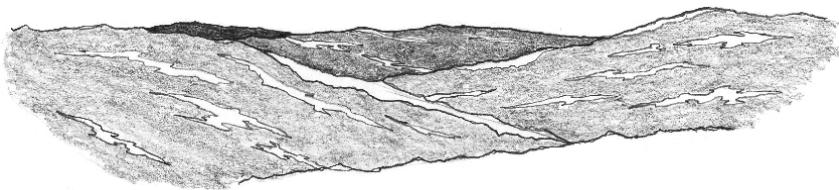
*D*ay One hundred and forty-six

At the second bell after daybreak this morning the Equinox, the Garemor and the Longreach appeared as white flags on our horizon, tacking from the south. By midday the Equinox had hauled alongside the Dromannion, its Captain eager to relay what they had found in the west. Captain Rendell and the other Officers of the Fleet then began earnest discussions on what they had found, and where our path ahead now lay.

In their time in the west the three ships had surveyed and tested all the shoals and islands in a wide stretch from the southern-most tip of the Midreach to the full extent of the shallow seas to the north. Slowly they had discovered that the shoals and sandbars of Caren'thal's recollections had changed. Many years have passed since the Dwarvendim adventurer had ventured this way and in the surge of time and tide a line of sandbars and shallows had grown into a barrier against any passage to the western coast of Clan'dael. Only at two points could a way be made westwards, at what the Equinox had named the Straits of Shabel, and the Straits of Elanna. Of both these passages the Straits of Shabel seemed the most navigable. From our position this is also the closest.

From what I have been able to gather of the meeting much was spoken on the movement of the tides and possible navigation hazards in both straits. It was decided quickly that the Straits of Shabel were our best option and in the hours afterwards preparations have begun to make sail and find our way through.

Activity aboard ship has grown to a fever pitch. The prospect of once again making landfall has put us all to work, and in that activity we have found great energy and purpose. Of all our number only Shalengael seems at odds to our hope. He has spent much time at the bow searching the horizon, a solitary figure looking for something that eludes him. I tried to talk with him but in his eyes there is disquiet. Without understanding what it is he so diligently searches for, and with no attempt to answer any of my enquiries, I have had no choice but to return to my own duties. If all goes well we will be before the Straits of Shabel by first light tomorrow.



Day One hundred and forty-seven

It is said in the lands of the Arranar that all the plans of Men can come to naught when the Fates decide that they have a better idea. Today has been a day that gives such a lamentation meaning. And yet I look at what has happened and know that I have taken an active part in a risky deception, one that yet must prove itself worthwhile. I will endeavour to record properly what has happened, even though there are some parts of this tale that I do not yet understand myself.

In the early hours of this morning, long before the rising of the suns I felt a hand upon my shoulder, rousing me from my sleep. To my surprise I found Shalengaels at my side, his finger to his lips, motioning me to be quiet. Carefully I rolled from my hammock and looked about the Capstan Well. All my fellow Assistants were still asleep, the Well a gloomy space full of shadows cast by the dying flickers of one small oil lamp.

Without explanation the Gael placed his hand on my arm and pointed to the door. Before I could find out what he wanted I found myself following him into the shadows of the companionway, the northerner a dark form moving quickly towards the mid-deck. When we emerged from below decks it became apparent that something was happening, something strange.

About me the wind raced through the shrouds of the ship. Sails billowed in the freshness, the ship pitching with the waves as it forged towards the Straits of Shabel, but about me there was no movement, no crew tending to the vessel on the night watch, no activity at all. In the light of both moons the deck was clearly illuminated, the crew unconscious against mast or gunwale or spread upon the hard deck itself.

I looked to Shalengael but he simply whispered a short retort for me not to worry. It was only as we reached the bow of the ship that he spoke. In the light of the moons the Dromannion stood large but the presence of the northerner seemed to grow before me. In this unnaturally quiet time Shalengael had a tale to tell, one that was for my ears alone.

In the rush of the wind the form of the Gael stood as a dark shape, bordered by the reflected light of the Dromannion at his back. In a hushed tone the man began to tell a story that had its roots embedded long before the Age of Reason, before Men saw the folly of belief and instead found strength in their own free will. In such a time the Gaels stood as the greatest power in the world, graced with the ability to form water, earth or sky in any manner they saw fit. But with that power came terrible responsibility, and it lay heavily upon each of the Gaels that the Hev'duil had also laid at their feet the ability to see the future. Such a gift meant that the consequence of each use of power they made in the world brought with it a clear vision of what was to follow, for good or ill. In the lives of the Gaels such prescience soon proved to be no boon.

Any use of their power changed the way the world moved forward in time. Each decision made, or path followed, turned into a tangled web of consequences that stretched out before the Gaels as a mesh of possibility. It took a disciplined mind to make sense of it, and many of Shalengael's brethren were not up to the task. Over time the Gaels faltered until finally only the northerner was left.

Shalengael paused for a moment, and in that silence a deep rumble reverberated out of the north. Lightning framed the horizon and again the roll of distant thunder swept across the sea towards us. Against such a backdrop I took the opportunity to ask him why he was telling me this. I got no answer, just a request to trust him. All would come clear he said, with the tale's conclusion.

Overhead the moons had begun to pass behind fast moving wisps of cloud, the glow about the ship dimming and brightening with each reappearance of their shining spheres. Shalengael waved his hand against the sky and the clouds parted, leaving the decks once again awash in a silvery light. I remember I had to shake my head to clear

the surprise I felt at that simple action. It had been nothing but a casual gesture and yet he had commanded the clouds themselves to submit to his will. I returned to his tale with even greater concentration.

For Shalengael the Age of Reason had proven a difficult time. To use his power would have left him vulnerable, and of all the things that he could see in his future the manner of his own death was always veiled. It was only with the coming of the Enemy that a new path had opened for him, and he had come to understand the true nature of his own destiny. All his life, all the centuries that he had lived in the world had been made possible by the Hev'duil so that he might fulfil one purpose. And that purpose was to be completed tonight.

I could not understand what he meant and he gave me no chance to question him. Instead he pointed to the west and asked me what I saw. In the darkness of the night I could see nothing but the gloom and the faint illumination of distant lightning struggling in its embrace. Out there he said was the death of us all. The Straits of Shabel would provide us with easy passage to the west coast of Clan'dael, but in taking that path we would sow the seeds of our own demise. Important opportunities would be missed and a great boon would pass unnoticed. If the Fleet was to reach the New World then this could not be the path taken.

From within the dark veil of his hooded cloak I could see nothing of his face. In his voice though, it was possible to hear the fatigue of one who had lived too long, and who now looked for a way to divest himself of the burdens that he had carried. Now was to be the time that the Gael would change the destiny of all.

With one hand pointing to the west Shalengael cupped the other in front of his chest and began to murmur a low chant. Flat and without discernible words the dirge floated on the rising wind as smoke might, carrying itself off to the west. Immediately I felt the air about the bow of the ship change, the wind captured by his will as it spiralled about his body, twisting its way in ever decreasing arcs as it concentrated its energy into the palm of his hand.

About us the winds blew inwards from all directions, spiralling tightly as a whirlpool sucks water into the depths of the ocean. In the rush of

the bluster I could just hear Shalengael's words as fragments, intermingling with the rising force of the wind. Slowly at first I began to see a faint glow beginning to coalesce in the air above his hand, a sphere of light forming as it drew on the increasing energy of the gale that was now enveloping us both. In the rush of the wind it intensified, shining brighter and brighter, gathering itself tighter until the air itself ignited in blue flame.

Within the swirling conflagration I stood beside the Gael, enveloped in his magic as he drew down this great power and concentrated its potency. Instantly I was bathed in blue light, the rushing winds warm and charged with energy as they rushed about us. I am not sure but within that moment of ignition I could feel the magic passing through me as if I was not there, existing only as a spectral witness to something beyond my reasoning to understand. I could stand beside the man for only a moment before my instincts screamed at me to move aside.

Startled by the brilliance of the flame I stepped back and looked to the foredeck for a way to back away from the power being conjured. It was then that I saw the cloud above beginning to twist in the glare of the shining blue sphere. Shalengael had control of the winds and the cloud above but this was still not enough for his purpose. Without giving pause to his incantation he chanted faster, the words merging into a stream of rising song that forced the air about us to become charged with energy. It was only when the shining sphere could seem to grow no brighter that I saw the first fireball descend out of the night sky and fall upon the Straits of Shabel.

In the west the cloud that bordered the horizon began to burn with a blue fire. At first I thought the cloud itself had ignited but then a great conflagration of burning rock punched its way through the high overcast and plunged downwards into the sea. One fireball was quickly followed by many and as they struck the Straits or its surrounding cliffs the stone exploded, showering the waters with incandescence as the deadly missiles found their target.

For many minutes the fireballs rained from the sky. A procession of brilliant blue points of light, careering through the cloud before detonating into the hard stone of the Midreach. I could not fathom

the means by which Shalengael had fashioned such a bombardment, but the purpose of it was clear enough. He was pounding the Straits of Shabel to ensure that we could not pass through. Whether we wished it or not, the Gael was changing our destiny, forcing us to take the other path.

For Shalengael however, there would be no need to confront the Captains of the Fleet to account for his actions. In the last moments of the conjuration the overbearing form of the Gael began to grow vague, flickering in the glow of his conjuration. As the light in his hand expanded and grew in power so did the form of Shalengael evaporate, dissipating quickly into the winds that swirled our position. As I watched he vanished from my sight, and in those last few moments I could hear in my thoughts his voice telling me to record what I had seen, tell no-one, and to trust that he had done the right thing. The rest was up to me. Then he was gone.

I can confess that I stood my ground for a time, trying to gain a foothold on what had happened. Shalengael had disappeared with the winds themselves and in the process had destroyed our chosen path to Clan'dael. About me, however, the ship was reawakening. Those crew who had fallen to the deck were rousing themselves and all over the ship I could hear the sounds of men and women trying to regain their senses. The northerner had done something to them so that he might work uninterrupted, and the spell he had cast had enveloped the entire Fleet in its embrace. As the ship awoke I quietly returned to my berth and considered the implications of what I had been a party to. There was no witness to this event but myself, and as has been the case before I will say nothing of it. I can only wonder as to what Shalengael meant by his last words to me, but I can say that he saved my life, and if I can repay him in any small measure by keeping silent then so be it.

Day One hundred and forty-eight

The disappearance of Shalengael has left the Dromannion in uproar. In the hour after sunrise he was noticed as missing and an immediate search held to find him aboard ship. Of course nothing was found, and as he had left all his personal effects it has been assumed that he

has met either with foul-play or had been the victim of an accident that had sent him overboard. Nobody believes the latter and the Captain has instituted an inquiry to determine the Gael's last movements aboard.

It has been difficult not to say anything but I will remain true to the northerner's request. Even as the Fleet edges closer to the Straits of Shabel I can feel a difference in the air, a faint familiarity that leads me to believe that Shalengael is not that far away after all. I can sense in the Maturi Hedj that he also has felt the same hint of familiarity on the breeze. In the evening of this day I saw him upon the wheeldeck looking into the east, sniffing the air as if it was telling him something. The Dwarvendim is a man who understands far more than he is prepared to tell, and there is a chance that he is aware of the Gael's fate, sensing him on the wind as I do.

Unlike the Maturi I cannot understand what has happened, nor give any reason for it. The destruction of our passage to the east has changed the direction of the Fleet, and put the officers of this ship in a dire mood. We came to anchor off the remains of the Strait an hour after first light and in the early morning the destruction was total. From a short distance off-shore all that could be seen was the smoking debris of a great cataclysm. High stone cliffs that once bordered the passage, in some cases rising to a height of almost eighty metres above the surface of the sea, lay collapsed into the waters, completely closing the strait from any further navigation. Huge craters had been gouged into what was left, a pock-marked terrain of smashed rock and steaming fissures. It was plain to all that there was no passage through, and because of Shalengael's magic, no understanding of what had happened.

As the Gael had planned the Fleet has been forced to turn northwards, and now makes at full sail for the Straits of Elanna. If all goes well we should make the western coast of Clan'dael within two days.



*D*ay One hundred and Fifty-two

Four days have passed since the closing of the Straits of Shabel and the Fleet labours in the teeth of a storm that has driven us too far to the north-east. Caught in its grip we have had to run before its power and have found ourselves now pushed back out into the Grey Sea, away from the Midreach and into deep waters. Only now, after three days of tempest has the wind begun to ease and the driving rain withdraw to the north. So close we have been to finding haven at Clan'dael and now we find ourselves again in the deep ocean, with at least another six days journey against the wind before we can make the Midreach. Nobody is happy with the delay, but there is little that can be done. In the midst of such circumstances we can do naught but endure it.

*D*ay One hundred and fifty-three

The storm has passed but the winds remain intransigent, rising in a gale from the south-west, pushing us further northwards as we attempt to track to the west. All day the crew has worked to bring the Dromannion closer to the Midreach but it has been to little avail. The wind shifts from south to west, foiling all attempts to make headway. It seems as if the wind is conspiring to keep us in the north, holding us helpless within its gales, and all the time edging us ever further away from our goal.

Against the brunt of this assault the ships of the Fleet ride the waves in a pounding cycle of rising water and plunging bows. Salt spray and sea mists tear across our decks, reducing visibility at all quarters and turning the sails into slick cascades of brine. Upon the wheeldeck the helmsmen fight to keep the ship to its course but it has proven a loosing battle, one which has exhausted the crew and left us floundering in the swell.

Below decks the Healer's Assistants have found themselves in great demand. The absence of Shalengael has seen a return of many of the afflictions that had seemed defeated by his craft. The tremoring disease has not returned, however Faren has redoubled our efforts in

searching the ship for possible cases. I do not believe the northerner would have left the Dromannion with such a danger still aboard, but it is prudent to be alert to the possibility.

The fight against the storm has also sent many crewmen into our surgery with injuries both minor and serious. One man has been lost overboard and nigh on a dozen more have been committed to our care for treatment. It has proven a busy day, and still the winds howl across our bows, providing us with no respite and little rest.



Day One hundred and fifty-four

Captain Duschet has made a decision and called a halt to our attempts to forge a return to the west. The wind has stymied every effort to make headway and so it has been decided to furl sail and drop sea-anchors. In the force of the gales the Fleet has been spread far upon the sea, and in an attempt to keep together the Captain has ordered every ship to a halt. Now we are at the mercy of the winds but we will ride out the bluster until favourable weather can be found.

In the clamour of the last days it has only now been discovered that Shalengael's possessions have been removed from his quarters, their whereabouts unknown. His books, and the few personal items that he owned are nowhere to be found. For what purpose they might have been taken is unclear as the northerner was the only man aboard who could read the books of the Haarn. A further investigation has been instigated by the Master-at-Arms but it would seem that there are few answers to be had.

As I write my notes I can hear the wind howling through the shrouds of the ship. It is a familiar sound, something unique to the Dromannion and something that sets it apart from all others. Like the Equinox it has its own song and even though I am four levels below the quarter-deck it is still discernible in the air, a vibration that

fills the ship and reverberates through the timbers beneath my feet. It is a comfort that I have grown used to on this voyage. While the Dromannion sings I know it is still strong, able to stand against anything the sea might throw against us. It is a comfort that I fear I shall miss if we ever do reach the New World.

*D*ay One hundred and fifty-six

In the evening of this day the winds retreated finally into the south. We have been pushed far to the north of the Midreach and now must make our way westwards. The Fleet has been spread over a wide area and three ships are currently unaccounted for. There is no anxiety at their disappearance however. The winds have spread us wide and those ships that have been blown too far to the north will take longer to regroup with the main body of the Fleet. We will have to wait for them though.

In the last light of dusk the scout-ship Arboron has been sent out to find them. Explosive flares are being fired on each striking of the ship's bell and I have spent some of my rare leisure time watching the flares light up the night sky. It is a grand display. With each striking of the hour five flares are sent skywards, tracing a long arc of sputtering light before detonating high overhead. The blacksmith has loaded each of the bolts with phosphorus and metal filings, a huge ball of incandescent particles the result as they explode. It is an awesome sight, one that has had most of the passengers of the Fleet up until the small hours. Even the NomDruse have come on deck to watch.

Most of the ships in the Fleet have now come together. Much work is needed after the wind-storm and the crews of each ship have not been idle. Rigging and sails have been badly worn by the interminable gales and all hands have been called to the task of making the Dromannion seaworthy once more.

We are marking time now, waiting for the Arboron to return. It is our hope that our wait will not be a long one.

*D*ay One hundred and fifty-seven

In the early hours of this morning the Arboron was sighted upon the northern horizon. The watch at the masthead called the sighting just as dawn was breaking in the east, and it was as the suns began to rise above the horizon that it first came to be realised that the Arboron had found more than just our missing ships.

Arrayed across the horizon at her stern rose the masts of twenty-seven ships, the three of our number that were missing, and twenty-four others of unknown origin. In a stir that I have not seen since we sighted Amen'wraith, the Dromannion came alive with excitement. On the wheeldeck the Captain and the Maturi Hedj looked to the ships for some hint of who they might be, and where they might be from. It was only as the ships drew closer that the shape of mast and sail gave an indication to their origins.

In the morning light the outline of the vessels became clear. All were twin-masted, elegant vessels, their rakish masts and triangular sails giving away their origin as Cembrian, a nation of the far northern wastes. Somehow they had survived the onslaught of the Enemy and made it to sea as well. Somehow they had made their way here.

The greatest surprise on this day of surprises was the return of one of our own, thought lost to the sea. In the midst of the Cembrian vessels rode the Kalborea, looking the worse for wear but with Captain Lovar standing at the helm, his crew waving madly in greeting as they drew alongside.

In the frantic activity of this unforeseen rendezvous I have been able to piece together some parts of the circumstances that has led our two fleets coming together. It is a story that merits being a part of this record.

In the early days of the attack upon our lands by the Enemy the peoples of Cembria stood helpless, their armies lost in the cold wastes of the northern ice-plains. Without the means to defend themselves those that could took to their ships, making south for the lands of Adoracia and the hope of safety that might be found there. To their

dismay they were met instead by the sight of burning cities and the cruel excesses of the Enemy's beasts of war. At all ports they found nothing but destruction and in desperation made for deep water, their intention to return to their homes and take up what resistance they could. Such was not to be their fate.

With limited provisions and a faltering water supply, the Cembrian Fleet headed northwards, making for the port-city of Halfalas and the cold hinterlands beyond that might serve as a hiding place for their number. Their destination proved elusive. From the east a storm rose against them, pushing the fleet deeper into the Grey Sea, shredding their sails and leaving a third of their ships unable to continue. Without hope they found themselves being carried into deep waters by swift currents and a blustering gale that would not allow them to return homewards.

On the twenty-seventh day of their sojourn they saw the birds. From the shores of Adoracia and the Northern Realms great multitudes of birds flew westwards, vast flocks winging to the horizon, their destination unknown. For the Cembrians this was an omen they could not ignore. Surely, they surmised, the flocks would not be flying to a certain death. There was a purpose to their flight and if land lay at the end of it, then their salvation could be found there as well.

With hope before them, the Cembrians took what they needed from those vessels that could not continue and set out westwards. Ill-prepared and with no idea as to the length of their voyage they set sail, following the flocks as they headed west, and finally disappeared beyond the horizon.

Weeks passed. Heavily laden ships, crammed with the last survivors of their nation, sailed doggedly into the west. Storms lashed them and hunger gripped their complement but they kept stoically to their heading. Without proper provisions however, disease quickly took hold, passengers and crew alike falling victim to starvation and scurvy.

In this time of desperation, the Captain of the Castaal, a man by the name of Gafen Wilbrims came to the fore. Under his leadership the Cembrian fleet began to organise and prepare for survival, rather than for a slow death upon the seas. Scouts were sent out to find land

whilst the body of the fleet began harvesting the sea and making proper provision for water. In Wilbrims the Cembrians saw a natural leader and rallied to the strength he provided. Luck also proved to be on his side.

News from the scout-ships told of an island in the north-west. Small, but possessed of an easy harbour and a verdant hinterland, it would provide the things needed most, fresh fruit and a chance to place feet upon solid ground. Wilbrims took the opportunity with both hands and set what was now his fleet on a track for the island. It proved all that the scouts had reported and for two weeks they tarried there, repairing their ships and restocking what they could from the small harvest the island could provide. It was not much but it would allow them to go further into the west than any Cembrian had gone before. Hopefully it would be enough.

Days passed again into weeks as they sailed westwards. No birds had been seen since the migration of those months previous, and without sight of land many on board began to despair that they may find nothing before them. Disease returned to the fleet, and sightings of the dreaded Kreel to the south left doubt and misgivings swirling through the passengers and crew. No-one knew what might lay ahead and the omen that had given such hope had proved unfulfilled.

Without sight of land despair gripped hard upon the fleet. No set path lay before them, the vast wastes of a turbulent sea all that they could look forward to. For most hope turned by degrees into an absolute certainty that what lay ahead was hunger and death. That there was no salvation in the west could not be argued against and despair fermented into anger, refugee turned against refugee, ship turned against ship. On one dark day all appeared lost, and it was then that their salvation sailed into view in the form of the Kalborea.

For the Kalborea's part in this tale there is much that I still need to ascertain. I have been unable to talk with Captain Lovar as of yet, but their journey has proven no less epic in its scope. For now I must be content with what I can record here.

In the storm that separated the Kalborea from the main body of the Fleet, it was pushed by high winds into the north. In the course of the

tempest the Kalborea's rudder and steerage lines had been broken, and without the ability to make any heading other than that provided by the wind, had been forced to ride the storm as far as it would take them. Three days of wind and wave put the ship far to the north, and in those days of tempest the crew struggled to keep the ship afloat.

When finally the storm had passed Captain Lovar and his men began the task of returning the Kalborea to seaworthiness. The rudder had been splintered by the power of the tempest and in their desperation the crew tore out planks from the lower decks to provide the timber for repairs. It was at this time that the wind once again grew in the south, blowing a chilled bluster that pushed the vessel further northwards. It would be some days before the wind once again eased and the ship could be fully repaired.

In the midst of these troubles the passengers and crew of the Kalborea could not know that they were drifting closer to a rendezvous that would change the destiny of the entire Fleet. Without knowledge of the whereabouts of their sister-ships, the Captain saw no alternative but to sail westwards and hope that at some point their paths would cross. He knew the general direction in which the Fleet would be moving but could not tell how much distance they might have travelled. The best chance at finding them again would be to travel to the north-west. It was his hope that as the Fleet was dispersed over a wide area, he might sight one of the outlying vessels and thereby make contact. He would keep what flares that remained to him for such a welcome sighting.

I cannot record here what tribulations must have confronted the lost ship in its passage to find the Fleet. Whether the Kalborea found its way peacefully, or fought to survive every day that passed is currently unknown to me. I can say that the ship shows sign of bad weather and at least one destructive impact against its port gunwales. A hastily patched tear in the side of the ship gives testament to violence but I have been unable to speak with any of crew. Most of the Healer's Assistants have been busy on this day assessing the health of the newcomers to our Fleet, and making lists of the survivors, so as to record and know who it is we now sail with. The story of the Kalborea remains sketchy, and in its brevity I must apologise.

A further twenty days passed as the Kalborea headed into the north-west, enduring storm and gale as they forged their way to a hopeful meeting with the remainder of the Fleet. What they found instead were the Cembrian ships, lost upon the wide ocean, languishing without hope, desperation breeding in their hearts.

It was a call from the stern watch that brought the Kalborea to turn about and make northwards. Masts had been sighted against the horizon and thinking that they had found the Fleet, Captain Lovar made full sail for the waiting ships. To his surprise he found instead the remnants of another fleet, one that was in desperate need of hope and direction.

For the Cembrians the appearance of the Kalborea out of the southern horizon was a salvation given up by Providence itself. With the Adoracian ship came news of a New World in the west, and of another Fleet somewhere upon the wide ocean. No proof was asked for, and with the decision of Captain Wilbrims to go where the Kalborea led, the remainder of the Cembrian fleet followed.

In this manner were the Cembrian ships brought back to the knowledge of Men. At the forefront stood the Kalborea, purposeful in its knowledge that there was a New World in the west, and in its wake rode its charges, spread wide to increase the possibility of contact. Hunger still haunted each of the ships, the hand of disease touching many as they made their way towards the Midreach. Now however, they would not stop, and with the Kalborea at the fore eventually made sight of the Arboron, itself searching for lost ships. Such is the circumstances in which the Cembrians came to our Fleet. I am sure that it shall be a story retold by many. On this day I must wonder how much of what has transpired is the doing of Shalengael. On a wide ocean it must be more than just coincidence that we have found each other. This is a question I will ponder but know I cannot answer.



*D*ay One hundred and fifty-eight

A manifest has been conducted on the ships of the Cembrians and their number has been counted at twenty-two seaworthy vessels. Two of their fleet have been surveyed as too damaged to continue and the total count of souls aboard amounts to three thousand two hundred. There has been little choice but to strip the two damaged vessels of all that is useful and redistribute their passengers aboard the other ships of their number. We have spent the day in this pursuit, adjusting for the newcomers and giving aid where it has been needed. On the coming morning we are to begin our return to the Midreach, and as I write I can feel the wind changing. It veers now from the east, a favourable bluster that should have us on our way forthwith.

It is fortuitous that we stand only a few days from the Midreach as the Cembrians bring with them nothing but their ships and themselves. Food and other provision have been distributed to all the newcomers and it is hoped that we will have enough to keep us all hale until we have anchored in Clan'dael. Although many have succumbed to illness and affliction the Cembrians have not been idle, helping with the work of the improvement of their lot as we lay at anchor. I have found two of their number to be experienced Healers, men of great knowledge who bring with them a different type of healing skill. It will be interesting to find time to talk with them.

Just as was the case with the Dwarvendim, the Cembrians have proven to be distinct in both mannerism and behaviour. Unlike the Dwarvendim, the Cembrians are to a person, tall and lean in appearance. At first I put this down to months at sea with little in the way of food, but it is apparent that these people of the northern realms have a naturally lean aspect. This is most noticeable in their Captain Wilbrims. He has struck me as being both a competent commander and slightly eccentric in manner and dress. He is loud and forceful in his opinion, having little regard for who might be listening as he discusses the business of his ship. In truth I cannot decide whether he is a trustworthy man, or a pirate who has found himself in a position of responsibility and is trying to mask his true nature. I can say however, that the Captains of his fleet follow him without question, and because of this Captain Duschet has given him

the same status as is allowed the Maturi Hedj. It will be interesting to see how such different characters will conduct the business of what is now such a large fleet.

In the course of my duties today I have noticed something of note, and wonder if it will prove of importance for the future. Those of the Cembrians that have been aboard have mentioned in conversation that there are more than just people of their own nation aboard. In the course of their flight southwards they have brought with them members of the Haldar and the Faen'eth as well, and a number of refugees from the Alnar Plains. I have heard also in such conversations the newcomers referring to themselves as the Kalborean fleet. It would seem that the arrival of the Kalborea at their darkest moment has had a more profound effect upon them than Captain Lovar could possibly have imagined.

To take into account the differing peoples who make up the newcomers I have decided to refer to them in this journal as Kalboreans. It is a name they seem comfortable with, and has already been put into use by others aboard. I have no doubt it will take hold as Captain Wilbrims has used it loudly on a number of occasions, and amongst his own people seems able to move their opinion at his whim.

*D*ay One hundred and sixty

The winds gust briskly out of the east and the Fleet makes a straight line now for the Midreach. The weather has blown into a gale, whipping up the sea and throwing ragged strands of cloud westwards as harbingers of our approach. The Fleet is spread wide, the lean form and raked masts of the Kalborean ships easily sighted amongst the larger vessels of our number. Two days of easterlies has seen us closer now to our destination, and a further two should see us touch the northern edge of the Midreach. The Straits of Elanna now lay as our only passage to the western shores of the islands, and I expect that once the shoals and stony cliffs of the Midreach are sighted that we will turn southwards, looking for the Straits and the safe harbours that lay beyond. After such a long time at sea I cannot wait for the sight of grass once again.

Day One hundred and sixty-one

On the evening of this day the northern edge of the Midreach has been sighted. As expected we have turned to the south, keeping a parallel course to the rough coastline that borders these islands. As was foretold by the Maturi Hedj there is no safe anchorage beneath these cliffs. A jagged coastline of dark grey stone looms before us, snaking its way southwards, edged by upthrusts of sea-washed rock that stand as broken teeth to the forces of wind and tide. It is an inhospitable barrier, against which any ship that journeys too close could not survive. In the approaching dark the pillars of stone stand tall against the surging sea. There can be little doubt that a ship's graveyard lies within the tumbled stone that must lay just below the waterline. We are giving it all a wide berth.

I can gladly report that I have now fulfilled my penance as a member of the dogwatch, and find that although I am happy to be free of the duty I will miss the solitude that comes with it. The Dromannion is a crowded ship, where a piece of free space can be hard to find, and the open air of the crownsnест is a small pleasure that I relinquish grudgingly. I have however, been returned to my full duties as a Healer's Assistant and with the additional needs of the Kalboreans, have little time to consider what I might have lost.

It is in my mind to volunteer for a dogwatch upon the mainmast when the opportunity arises. Although there are those who consider it an odious duty, I may yet find myself aloft once again.

Day One hundred and sixty-three

The Straits of Elanna have been sighted to the south-west and the Dromannion is to be the first through. On its previous scouting mission the Equinox has shown it safe for navigation and Captain Duschet sees no reason to delay our passage any further. The Fleet will follow but it will be a tentative path that we will travel. The Midreach coastline has proven to be a rugged shore and it will be no different as we traverse the Straits. From the accounts of Captain Rendell a more hospitable shoreline will not be encountered until we

have passed well beyond the western mouth of the passage and then turned north towards Clan'dael.

At mid-morning we passed the eastern cusp of the Straits of Elanna before turning onto a north-westerly heading. At both sides of the ship I have seen high walls of stone that reach to a height far greater than that of the Dromannion's masts. From these high cliffs we have heard the fall of stone and the screeching of sea-birds but there is little sign of danger. The Krelle are nowhere to be seen and it would appear that we have left them in the south. They must have nesting-grounds upon the islands of the southern Midreach and do not seem disposed to fly any further northwards. I am sure that their absence from our lives gives me no great concern.

The Straits are wider than I had expected, the navigation of the passage an easier affair than had been described by the Captain of the Equinox. It seems almost out of place that a part of our voyage should prove easier than anticipated, and those officers who inhabit the wheeldeck have relaxed visibly as we have pushed further into the passage. It has been slow going though, the speed of the ship measured against the need to move carefully in an unfamiliar setting. Crew at the bow of the ship take constant soundings of the waters and are ever watchful for sign of submerged hazards. I have been told that at our current rate of travel we should be out of the Strait by evening.

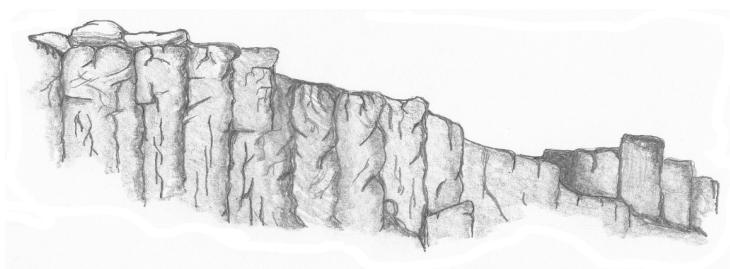
*D*ay One hundred and sixty-four

This morning has been spent at anchor to the north of the western exit of the straits. Overnight and through the early hours of the day I have watched as each ship of the Fleet has made a tentative emergence into open waters on this side of the Midreach. The Straits of Elanna have given us no cause for dismay thus far, the cliffs bordering the passage opening into a wide channel as we made for open water. On this side of the islands we have found a very different aspect to the Midreach, one that gives us all hope that the accounts of Caren'thal the Younger will prove accurate.

What I can see in the bright light of this morning is a line of islands spreading into the north and another archipelago extending far to the south. In the north the islands are bordered at their western shores by low cliffs and stone beaches, the land sloping down from the rugged cliffs of the east into a series of shallow valleys and open grasslands in the west. The islands of Clan'dael should prove to be far larger. If Fate looks kindly upon us we should find food and the materials necessary to repair our ships.

Word has been circulating through the ship that the move for some of our number to stay in Clan'dael is growing stronger, even though we have not yet seen landfall and cannot know what awaits us there. Most aboard see the islands as another step on our path to the New World but for some the voyage has already been too much, a journey too long in progress. Whether those who wish to stay will be allowed to disembark is still to be decided. It would be a sad thing to see familiar faces leave the ship, but it might also lessen the overcrowding that is a constant circumstance of our daily lives. Such decisions must be left for Captain Duschet and I am glad that it is not for me to say.

Our objective lies at least a further day's sail to the north but is close enough that I can smell the pungent odours of grass and wet earth upon the wind. Against the ever-present smell of the sea it is a powerful motivation to move on. We must wait however until all of the Fleet has passed safely through the confines of the cliffs. Once all are through we will make sail.



Day One hundred and sixty-five

We have encountered further delays but finally this morning the Dromannion has set sail for Clan'dael. The three largest islands of the Midreach lay ahead and we now make good speed in our quest to find a suitable harbour. The Allahard and the Castaal have moved ahead of the body of the Fleet to look for a safe anchorage and it is said that we will get word from them by this evening.

The day has turned fine and warm. In the lee of the islands the wind is lighter and the ship has been set with extra sail to push us faster northwards. As is always the case my duties are constant and the needs of the Dromannion do not cease just because we are approaching landfall. The crew is at work and the normal routine of the ship goes on. We have all spent time however, looking to the north and east, searching for the first signs of the main islands of the Midreach. The ship is alive with the anticipation of finding Clan'dael as it has been described in the writings of Caren'thal. I cannot help but hope fervently that we will find more than bare islands and crumbling cliffs.

Day One hundred and sixty-seven

It is said in the legends of Caren'thal the Younger that when the adventurer first spied the cragged coastline of the Midreach that he thought he had found the edge of the world. After months under sail the shoals and cliffs that confronted him seemed a natural barrier to any attempt to journey further westwards. In his mind there could be nothing beyond except perhaps for the habitations of the suns and the moons, a void of rest for the celestial beings as they took their ease after crossing the sky. It was only after finding the straits of Elanna and Shabel that Caren'thal discovered the world to be far larger than he could possibly have conceived.

It was the intention of Caren'thal that he would take his ship, the Longreach, as far to the west as it was possible to go. Before leaving the Midreach however, he needed to find water and began a survey of

the islands to the north, his hope that there might be natural springs and a quiet harbour in which to shelter. It was by this route that he discovered Clan'dael.

What he found upon the three largest islands in the north was a land of wide forests and grasslands, bordered to the north and east by high mountains. The largest of the islands he called Auren'dael, and it was there that he found both the shelter he needed and the fresh water that would prove vital to his journeys to the New World. It was there that he also found mysteries that would remain unsolved in his lifetime and in the lifetimes of his descendants. Little could any of us realise that such mysteries might still be waiting, silent and patient through the endless panorama of the years.

Our first sighting of Auren'dael came in the evening, an hour before dusk, just as the suns of our world had almost ended their descent into darkness. Off our starboard bow, the sails of the Avernell and the Castaal hove into view, clean white shapes against the deep blue of the sea, making quickly for our position. Without need for signal the Dromannion changed course, and with the two scout ships turning about led our vessel into the gathering dark. At our backs the rest of the Fleet followed, each turning with the Dromannion as it made for a large island that rose out of the horizon ahead.

At first there was not much that could be seen, the gloom of night quickly wrapping the world in darkness. But as the island loomed closer the first of a series of landmarks came into view. Upon a long seawall of carved stone stood a huge statue of a robed, hooded figure, at least four times the height of the Dromannion's mainmast. Staring out into the setting suns, the faceless figure stood one arm raised, pointing into the west, as if showing the way. Behind it stood another, some two hundred metres distant, and then a further nine, all evenly spaced along a seawall strewn with fallen stone. With the memory of the earth-spirits still fresh in our minds all of us on deck looked immediately to the Captain and the Maturi Hedj, but there was to be no call to arms here. The statues were just that, the remnants of some long-lost dominion, carved in a time that we could not know of and etched with the wear of long exposure.

The Avernell and the Castaal took us past these figures and then into a wide natural harbour bordered on each of its shores by steeply sloped hills. Upon these slopes lay the ruins of a city, one that extended by steps to the summit of each hill, and upon the highest of these hills stood a tall citadel, towers broken, its walls crumbled with age. In the red glow of last light the ruins stood out, orange against the dark stone of the hills. It is in the quiet waters of this harbour that we dropped anchor, and in the encroaching dark have set lanterns to guide the remainder of the Fleet to our side. After much travail we have finally arrived in Clan'dael.

*D*ay One hundred and sixty-eight

The day has begun with great activity, the plans and objectives of our stay in full operation with an exodus of passengers into the confines of the ruined city and its hinterland. Along the shoreline the ships of our Fleet have made anchor, a line of vessels that extends around the entire length of the harbour. In the quiet of the morning I have seen a continuous embarkation of people and equipment, steadily spreading into the ruins as we determine what this island can offer. It has taken little time to find the city deserted and without danger, a ruin of immense age where only the decrepit nature of the stone itself provides any cause for concern.

As with our sojourn in Amen'wraith we have all been given tasks to perform, and at the start of this day I find myself part of a surveying team charged with the job of mapping the harbour and its surrounds. For the Captain of the Fleet this is an important charge, a task that he wishes completed within our first two days ashore. Our Surveyor says that this is a job that can be done so I have been seconded to his team as a Medical Aide. Apart from being on hand if any misfortune should fall upon any of the Surveyor's complement I have found myself reduced to the role of porter, carrying my share of the equipment required for the task.

So far it has proven difficult. To complete a proper survey of the harbour and its environs we have spent the day trudging over the length and breadth of the ruins, laying out markers and taking angles and measurements. Most of this has been achieved in short order but

the main objective of our day lays at the highest point on the hills that border the harbour. This will be our task for the afternoon and will require climbing and a head for heights.

The only benefit of my duty has been the ability to see at close hand the activities of the Fleet as we take advantage of our stay here. The crews of each ship have lent all their efforts to repair and refurbishment. Parties have left to explore into the forests of the south looking for suitable timber and there is a possibility that a new foremast will be fashioned for the Dromannion. On the shoreline and within the closer borders of the ruins people are busy with their duties. I have seen many taking the time to enjoy the feel of firm ground beneath their feet before beginning their tasks.

For myself the ruins themselves have proven of the greatest interest. Apart from the huge sentinels that line the seawall, the ruins are very much human in size and function. We have found wide streets and large areas of fallen stone that outline substantial buildings, market squares and temples. The stone that remains standing shows a high level of artifice, but curiously there are no inscriptions or evidence of language of any type. Even the shards of pottery I have found in our wanderings are completely plain, without design or decoration. I cannot infer anything from this but it does seem strange to me. I can say that the pieces I have found have been made for human hands and that makes me wonder who these people were, and how they met their demise in such a distant place.

The more I travel the ruins the greater is my sense that this city was the home of Men and for many of our number this has only strengthened their resolve to stay. From reports gathered in from the many parties that have fanned out over the island it seems that all the basics required for settlement can be found here. Rivers and other watercourses flow from the mountains in the north, the ground is rich and deep, wide grasslands covering the interior. To the south are forests, not unlike those of Amen'wraith, and the Dwarvendim have already located evidence of both quarries and mining in the east. We have found little to show that settlement could not flourish here and this has put in the minds of some the strong intention to remain.

To this end Captain Duschet has asked for a poll to be taken of all members of the Fleet, to ascertain who might wish to stay. It is his intention to remain here in Auren'dael for at least three weeks and has decided that those who wish to settle here may do so. I can see his purpose in this regard. Our ships are overcrowded, short on space and most limited in their ability to store provisions for what still may prove to be the longest leg of our voyage. If some wish to remain it may make the chances of a successful voyage to the New World for the rest of us all the more possible. It has fallen to the responsibility of the Administrators to conduct the poll. For my part I have decided that I will be going on to the New World. In my heart I know that it is there that my destiny lays.

For this day my writing must end. Ahead is the promise of a long climb lugging equipment to the citadel that stands high above the harbour in the east and I am being called to my duty. I can say truthfully that the exertions of this day have left me tired and I am not looking forward to it.

*D*ay One hundred and sixty-nine

Day One hundred and sixty-nine of our journey finds me lying upon a bed in our Surgery aboard the Dromannion, nursing a broken ankle and, I am ashamed to say, developing a deep resentment of the Surveyor and his craft. I do not find the experience of being injured a pleasant one and now remain unable to move, waiting for Faren to attend to the setting of the bones. Like our ascent to the citadel I am not looking forward to that either.

Thankfully Lanja Narris has taken on the burden of my care and I find her attentions most agreeable. She does however, seem intent on making me repeat the circumstances of my injury. For a reason I cannot determine she seems to find some humour in it but thankfully I need only state it once for this journal. As might be said for the beginning of many stories it all started out so simply.

With the striking of the first bell after midday the Surveyor's party left the activity of the shoreline and struck out for the citadel. Sitting atop the highest hill that bordered the harbour it was the last remaining

landmark that needed measurement, and from its lofty vantage most of the markers that had been placed in the morning hours could also be remeasured and checked. As a process it was something I can say honestly that I did not understand.

The Surveyor was meticulous in his task, checking and rechecking every angle taken, remeasuring every distance that seemed important, and always applying notes and other scratchings to a roll of parchment that remained constantly under his arm. It was an arcane business that would, he assured us all as we laboured under the weight of his equipment, be of great help in planning for the settlement of the city.

When we arrived at the base of the hill in question we found a series of wide levels that extended up the slope to the base of the citadel itself. Each of these levels was connected by large, extensive stairways that reached upwards before ending at the gates of what was once a fortified hilltop. From our position at the root of the stairs it was impossible to tell how far we might need to walk to reach the top, but as I looked at what was before us I could feel the weight of my load growing all the heavier.

In the bright light of a clear afternoon we began our ascent. In the party stood six men, the Surveyor at the front, followed in line by those of us who had been chosen as his pack animals for the day. Each of us was loaded with equipment, and in the warmth of the afternoon we all soon came to feel the labour of the climb. It proved fortunate that the makers of this ruined city had built their stairway in shallow levels and had left landings evenly spaced upon its ascent where the weary might rest. Within the hour we reached the top and as we passed from the highest level of the stairway found ourselves upon a wide platform of stone that opened into a courtyard and a single high-arched entranceway. Here was our entry to the citadel itself and the Surveyor took no time to rest before moving inside.

The citadel proved to be a straightforward affair, an octagonal-shaped fortress enclosed within a single high wall. Crumbling circular towers reached at four opposing corners and a stout inner Keep made up what must have been a redoubtable fortification in its heyday. The most unusual aspect of the citadel stood upon the

western face of the hill, a long bridge of stone that arched out from the parapets as one might expect a half-made bridge, reaching out into nothingness. Extending from the western wall of the fortress it proved to be a flat walkway that ended in a small landing of octagonal stonework.

From this high point it was the Surveyor's intention to make the last of his measurements and triangulations, and with its completion return to the Dromannion to begin the task of drafting the maps that were the object of our labours. First however, he commenced a survey of the citadel itself, plotting and marking the walls and other buildings within their ruined perimeter. This kept us busy once again until the last hour of daylight, placing markers and rolling out long cords of measuring tape. Such was the focus placed upon this job by the Surveyor that when he realised the lateness of the hour he quickly grabbed up his parchments and made for the high platform.

As I think on it I should have been more mindful of where we were, and not been so rash in my own actions, but a need for haste comes with its own dangers and on this day it was I who paid the price for it.

The Surveyor called for two of us to follow and motioned for a number of instruments on tripod stands to be brought to him. I was nearest to one and instinctively gathered it up and made after the Surveyor. The man was in a hurry and held his parchments under his arm. It is a curious thing but it was in my thoughts just prior to their snatching away that they seemed to be held in a precarious perch, and as soon as he rose above the shelter of the broken western wall was caught in the grip of a stiff easterly bluster. Off went the man's hat and as he grabbed for it, so did his parchments take flight from under his arm. Yelling to all and sundry for someone to catch the papers before they disappeared into the harbour below we all raced for them. I was nearest to where the parchments first made ground and as they scattered across the broken stonework raced to recover them.

It was not that I cared that much for them, I just did not wish to have to redo all the time and labour that had been expended on their making. As the papers were blown towards a gaping breach in the walls I ran, and as I grabbed for them did not notice the steep slope

that fell away on the other side. Before I could stop myself I had toppled over the edge, my last conscious thought the sight of the Surveyor's papers fluttering down behind me, sharply white against the dark blue of the sky. Then all went black.

I awoke to find myself where I now reside, aching temples, a sore chest, and a swollen ankle the price paid for my carelessness. For today this is all that I can write. I hear Faren in the corridor.



*D*ay One hundred and seventy-one

It has been two days since my injury and as is the custom with such damages I have been confined to bed, my leg braced and strapped. A thorough examination by the Healer Faren has shown me to have a broken ankle, a concussion and three broken ribs. It is his determination that I will not be mobile for at least three weeks, and will be unable to return to my duties for at least five. It distresses me greatly that I have been rendered infirm at such an important time but there is naught that can be done about it. I am confined now to bed rest, and to battle the soporific effects of boiled gamba root, an ugly concoction that eases the pain in my leg but leaves me light-headed and unsteady.

About me the activity of the ship continues. On the beaches a new foremast is now being shaped for the Dromannion and I have been told by Ahlek Norahm that it will be ready within the week. From my bed I can hear the sounds of men and women at work, most involved in the packing and stowage of supplies brought in from the island's hinterland. It should come as no surprise that the provision of a large ship is a complex and extensive task, one that requires considerable effort and time. Although our holds still contain substantial supplies the needs of the new settlers, and the unforeseen addition of the Kalboreans to our number, has meant that we must be diligent in our efforts to restock. The sounds of this work have been a constant backdrop to my recuperation and a reminder of my need to heal quickly.

I have been the object of many visits during the course of the last few days, mostly my fellow Assistants enquiring as to my health. One visit was more notable than the rest and it came as quite a surprise. At the time of the evening meal the Shadar Len attended my bedside, asking as to the nature of my injuries and if I would be up to a visit in the morning. It seems that the Maturi Hedj has some questions for me and wishes to take the time to ask them. I do not see any good reason to say no and the Shadar left happy with the appointment. What the Maturi may wish with me I cannot say. The morning will no doubt give me my answer.

*D*ay One hundred and seventy-two

In the early hours of this morning the wind turned westerly, blowing off the open sea at our anchorage and rocking the Dromannion in the swell it has raised with it. We have been fortunate in the first four days of our sojourn here to have been favoured with clear skies and warm suns, but the weather has turned and I have been told that a cloud bank now moves towards us. We are in for a nasty change.

I must record here that it is not only the weather that has changed. In the quiet of the night I awoke suddenly from a dream to find myself sitting upright, a churning feeling in my stomach, a strange anxiety grinding at me that I could not fathom. At first I placed the unease at the change in the pitch of the Dromannion as it rode at anchor but there was something else, something alien to my thoughts that kept me awake for the remainder of the night. Laying in bed did nothing to quiet the anxiousness I felt. It was only with the rising of the suns that the strangeness left me and I was able to return to sleep. My rest was short-lived however, for no sooner had I put my head down than the Maturi Hedj arrived, ready for his interview and with the benefit of a full night's sleep at his disposal.

It can be said that the Maturi Hedj is an interesting man, one who commands the absolute attention of his people, and who seems very comfortable with the authority that he wields. Although he stands roughly at the same height as myself, he is powerfully built and possesses the immense strength common to all his brethren. In his robes he is an imposing figure and in the confines of the small space

that is my berth in the Surgery he commanded all the room that was available.

To talk to him however, leaves the impression that he has never needed to solve any problem with force. Behind the imposing figure of the man hides a keen mind and it did not take me long to realise that the mundane conversation he began with was only the prelude to a subtle interrogation. In a way it was not surprising that the Maturi had come to see me. From his questions it was evident that he believed that I had information on the disappearance of Shalengael and seemed intent on confirming that I had some part in it.

I can record here in my writings that the Maturi wished to know all that I knew of the northerner, and what I understood about the disappearance of the man. Carefully he tried to find out what I knew but there was more to his questions that quickly became apparent. In his words there lay a double meaning to each enquiry, a subtle implication that I had full knowledge of what happened to Shalengael, and he knew that I was aware of what he was doing. We were talking in a public area, where any number of people might overhear what we were saying, but he couched his words in such a fashion that I could be in no doubt he knew I had been in attendance when Shalengael had disappeared.

The game of words went on for only a short time, I had no intention of betraying the trust that Shalengael had placed in me, and the Maturi accepted easily that I was not going to give him what he wanted. As he motioned to leave he placed in my hands a small talisman, a necklace of leather strapping that held in a small metal clasp a thumb-sized teardrop of polished black obsidian. I thanked him for the gift and he departed. It is in my thoughts that he will return. He does not seem the kind of man who would give up that easily.

The remainder of this day has proved uneventful. Although the weather is now turning the activities ashore have not lessened. I can see nothing from my berth in the surgery but the ship is alive with frantic effort and the noise of that work can be heard clearly. It is unfortunate but few of my fellow patients are in much shape for talk, so I spend my time instead trying not to move my leg and waiting the long hours in the hope that someone may come to visit. In this

solitude I have made up my mind firmly that if I must once again save someone's parchments I will let the wind decide their fate. It will be a long time before I shall forget the pain that comes with having an ankle reset.



*D*ay One hundred and seventy-three

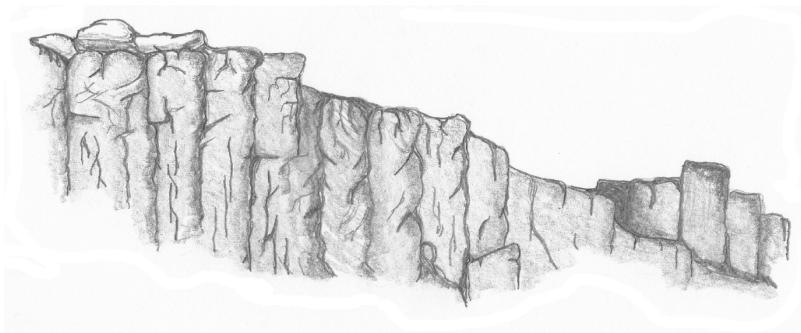
The work of the Fleet continues and I continue my exile from the world with growing frustration. Within the city temporary accommodations are being erected for those who are to stay behind, and it has been decided that the ruins are to become the new home of our settlers. Apart from the fine harbour, the ruined city has also given up a number of its secrets, including a salvageable sewer system and a network of natural rock cisterns that will provide all the fresh water that could be required by those that are remaining. The Dwarvendim have taken on the refurbishment of these facilities as a project well suited to their skills and I can say that I have not seen Lanja Narris as excited as she now appears. The working of stone is a skill natural-born to her people and they seem almost privileged to have the opportunity to return something so ancient back to service.

I have heard from Faren that the muster of those who are to remain has been completed. In total one thousand-eight hundred souls are to remain. These settlers have already removed their belongings from the Fleet, and have begun the process of ensuring their accommodations are complete and that they have everything they need to make a life here. Included in this number are sixty of the Dwarvendim, who have volunteered to remain and help continue the rebuilding of the city. Although Captain Duschet has his misgivings about leaving anyone behind, the settlers and the Captain have come to an arrangement which seems to meet the needs of both.

It has been agreed that any who wish to stay behind may do so. However, the Captain has promised that if the New World is indeed to be found in the west then he will return ships to Clan'dael to retrieve

any who may wish to continue on. It is his estimation that even if settlement proves difficult here that the settlers will be able to survive at least two years. Once our presence has been established in the New World ships will be dispatched to the Midreach to ensure that all is well. If not the settlers will be gathered up and returned to rejoin our number, sure in the knowledge that a new home awaits them.

To my knowledge this has been deemed acceptable to all, and from what I can find out from those who come to the Surgery has given many others cause to think on whether they should stay behind also. It is compelling to consider the notion of remaining and building a life here, safe from the vagaries of an unknown sea, but in this matter I have decided my course. It is in the New World that my destiny will be found. I cannot think of any reason to delay it.



Day One hundred and seventy-five

Today has seen great activity within the harbour and ruins of Auren'dael. The Fleet rocks at anchor, safe from the strength of a southerly wind that has churned the ocean out beyond the headwaters of our sanctuary. The work of the past days has left us with holds now full again with the supplies needed for the remainder of our voyage. With these needs met the attention of all has turned to providing the best start for the settlers that are to remain. With thousands of hands put to the task the roads and boulevards of the city are being cleared, the broken stone and other debris hauled to quarry pits where it is to be reused as building material and road base.

Amongst all this I remain constrained to my bed. I can only imagine what changes are being wrought upon the city but I find that in my isolation I have come to notice changes in myself. It has started as a mere prickling sensation in my feet but there is something happening to my body, a strange warmth that flows around my limbs in waves that come and go. I have mentioned nothing about it so far to those who tend me. It is uncomfortable in its own manner but I somehow know that it has nothing to do with illness, or the injuries I received in my fall. Instead I have a sense that I should just let it take its course and see what happens.

*D*ay One hundred and seventy-six

In the early morning a squall passed over the island, bringing with it a veil of rain and mists that have endured over the course of the day. With the weather keeping most under cover I have been blessed with many visitors and a continuous stream of news on what is happening within the city. Ahlek Norahm has been my most conscientious visitor today and from him I have gained information on a most intriguing discovery made by the Dwarvendim.

For the past three days the Dwarvendim have been engaged in two main projects, rebuilding the water cisterns that extend as a network of underground caverns, and making repair to the high citadel so that it might be used as a sanctuary in times of danger. In these tasks they have committed great energy and it was during the clearing of the Keep upon the highest point of the citadel that they made a most remarkable discovery. Beneath a mound of ancient rubble the Dwarvendim uncovered an entry to a stairwell that descends deep into the stone beneath their feet. A short exploration showed the stairs leads to a temple complex beneath the Keep that appears to be in good order, and which extends for some distance into the hills east of the city.

It was within this complex of corridors and elegantly laid halls that the explorers found a pool of liquid that has confounded any attempt at identification. From the words of Ahlek it appears that the pool is circular in shape, contained within an elaborately carved container of stone that stands almost waist high. It is notable that this is the only

decorative carving that has so far been found within the city and is said to be of an extraordinary quality. The Dwarvendim themselves have said that they have never seen anything like it, but it is the liquid it contains that has left all who look upon it stumbling to describe what it might be.

To the eye it appears as water might in the last light of day, fluid but almost metallic in nature. Only one man has had the courage to place his hand within it and reports that it is hot to the touch but cannot be scooped or taken in any way from the pool it resides in. The Maturi Hedj and his Shadar have given no clue as to its purpose and for the moment it remains a mystery. The temple complex however, has proven empty but for this strange remnant and until further investigation is to be left well alone.

Other mysteries have also emerged within the hinterland of this island. Our hunters and gatherers have found more than a dozen ruins, all smaller than this harbour-city but all in a similar state of decay. Roads have also been uncovered and at least two temple-like structures that overlook the rugged eastern cliffs that proved so foreboding on our approach to the Midreach. It seems that Auren'dael was once the seat of a sophisticated culture that has, for reasons that it is too early to fathom, come to a crushing end in a time so ancient that all that remains are the broken ruins of their works. Of all that we have found here there is only one fact that seems beyond dispute. The cities and temples of this island were fashioned for the use of Men. How they might have come to be here, and why they met such an end, are questions that will have to be left to the settlers to consider when the time allows.

The welcome attention of my visitors today has lessened the frustration that being confined to bed has wrought. The strange warmth that ebbs within me continues but the uncomfortable sensations have passed. Instead I now feel a sense of wellness within me that I can feel working at the sprains and fractures that keep me bedridden. In the dark of night I find that I cannot sleep, and in those quiet hours my mind races with insistent whispers that talk not to me but to each other.

I could, if I wished, believe that I am going mad but there is a rational calm to the voices that is both reassuring and compelling. Within their conversations I can understand little, they talk of the future and of past glories whilst taking no notice of my presence. I listen though, intent on the to and fro of their discussions. I do not know why but I feel it is important to listen, but in the dark it is something to do as I lay awake.

These are not the only changes that are now subtly emerging. There are times when the wind is blowing strongly that I can feel an energy focusing itself within my hands and forearms. It is a sensation of warmth and fire that moves along the palms of my hands and out into my fingertips before retreating. Like a coiled spring it gives me the feeling that if I knew how to, I could make it unleash itself, bursting from whatever constraints hold it within me. These feelings of power have been increasing within the last few hours and of all that has been happening to me it is this which causes me the greatest concern. In my mind I know that these changes have everything to do with the demise of Shalengael and my proximity to his magics, but I do not know how to stop them. I had better tell the Healer Faren when he returns.

Day One hundred and eighty-one

This morning I was awoken by the hand of Lanja Narris at my shoulder. About the bed stood the Maturi Hedj, Faren, Ahlek Norahm and a number of my fellow assistants. I can confess that I was surprised to see them there, the small area of my bed space fully surrounded by their concerned faces. At first I thought that I must have done something but Faren quickly explained their obvious relief at my waking. He informed me that I had lapsed into a coma and for the last five days have lain without moving, my body rigid with a high fever that could not be broken.

I have no knowledge or remembrance of these days past. In fact the only memory that lingers with me is the thought that I needed to speak with Faren, but had failed to do so as he had not returned to the Surgery that evening. All else is a fog that gives me no insight into what might have happened. But something happened nonetheless.

Whilst I lay upon my bed the Healers gave me a full examination. All sign of my injuries have disappeared, my ankle now fully healed. Carefully I was helped onto my feet and apart from a slight nausea was able to stand without difficulty. I could not help but notice the glances exchanged between the Healers. Injuries that should have taken weeks to heal and months to fully recover from had disappeared as if they were never there. It was a mystery that I knew would be fully investigated but as I answered their questions I could feel that the energy that had been growing within me had dissipated, the voices that had kept me company within the dark hours had gone. In the light of the morning I felt completely my old self.

For today at least I must remain in the Surgery then I am to be returned to my duties. I thank Providence that I need not stay any longer than that.

Day One hundred and eighty-two

Another day passes as we sojourn in Auren'dael and finally I have been allowed to step upon the upper decks and see what progress we have made. After so long below it took me a few minutes for my eyes to adjust to the brightness of the morning, but in the light of day it is clear that what we have achieved on this island is extraordinary. The Fleet rests at anchor just as I had left it, more than half the ships dotted along the shoreline, the rest spread about the harbour. The ruins however has been transformed. To the north there has grown a tent-city, a collection of temporary accommodations that is quickly making way for more permanent housing within the ruins. All the boulevards in the centre of the city have been cleared and where ruins once stood a new settlement has grown of white-painted houses and other buildings designed to serve the settlers after the Fleet has gone.

To meet all the needs of the settlers the Dwarvendim have introduced them to a new technique for the construction of dwellings and other buildings. Called durgat it is an amazing mixture of rock, sand and lime, plus a few other ingredients that I have not yet been able to identify. Mixed with water in the right proportions it can be formed into blocks or moulded into any shape required. Within hours it sets as hard as the rock it is made up of, and with this material the

Dwarvendim have been able to build housing and other structures at an astonishing rate. I have been told that five Dwarvendim can build a house easily within three days, and with hundreds of them involved in the work a new city has spread within the ruins. It is their practice to finish each new building by painting it completely in white. I believe any further decoration is to be left to the settlers.

Contrasted against the glaring white of the buildings, there has been a concerted effort to plant food gardens and tend to the many old trees that are scattered through the ruins. One tree in particular has caught my attention. Upon the second level of the city spreads a wide area of open ground, bordered by a low stone wall that many have surmised must have previously been a marketplace or a sporting arena. With the passing of the original inhabitants this space had become overrun with trees and shrubs. All of this had been removed except for a huge spreading Oak that sits squarely in the centre of the market. This tree has remained and it dwarfs everything else in the city except for the high citadel. The new residents of this land have taken the Oak as a symbol of their new-found independence, and its ability to survive the years in such stony ground does seem fitting.

I spent most of the morning watching as the work continued ashore. The Captain has said that we can only remain a further five days and then the Fleet must once again make sail. With a deadline now set for our departure the work crews have redoubled their efforts ashore and the crewmen of all ships now look to their own vessels for whatever repair and maintenance is still required. Ahead lays the second half of our voyage and there will be no landfalls before we reach the New World.

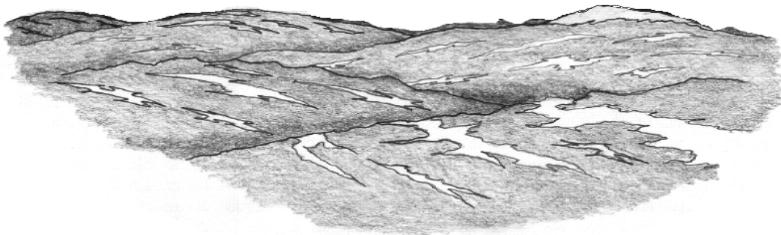
I am happy to say also that the Dromannion now sports a new foremast. Raised in the days I was unconscious it has been the focus of most activity aboard ship. I do not know the details of what is required to fit a new mast but it seems the crew have had to take down most of the rigging on the ship and rethread every rope and pulley aboard to accommodate it. It is an arduous task that will take a further two days to complete and I do not believe that any of the crew would have wished to do it on the open ocean. Such complicated maintenance is also being conducted on many other ships at anchor. I believe that whatever time we have left here will be put to good use.

In the early evening I was called to a meeting with the Maturi Hedj. The circumstances of my recovery have no doubt piqued his interest, and I attended his accommodations on the wheeldeck with the expectation that I would once again be fielding questions regarding Shalengael and the circumstances of his disappearance. To my surprise I have instead been invited to be a part of an expedition to view the pool of liquid found beneath the citadel Keep. My inclusion has already been approved by the Captain and it would seem that the Maturi greatly desires my attendance. I have agreed although I cannot see why it should be so important. We will be leaving at first light in the morning.

*D*ay One hundred and eighty-three

The night has passed slowly but not because the voices have returned. When I first arose from my sickbed I could tell that the strangeness that had afflicted me before had gone, but now that a few days have passed I can feel that something within me has indeed changed. In the shadows of the night it is easier to sense the subtle differences that have been wrought upon me. No longer is the power that had grown within me uncontrolled. At first it remained hidden but I find now that I am its master, able to bring it to the surface at will. I can report that in the dark of the Capstan Well I have been able to summon the same energy that Shalengael had harnessed so effectively. Raising my hand, I thought on a light appearing at my fingertips and in response the faintest of blue shimmers appeared, surrounding my hand and then diminishing away. At first I came upon this new skill by accident but I have found that conscious thought, and considerable practice, allows me to produce the light and form it in any way I think fit. I can record that as of yet I can find no practical use for this, and the more I think on it I must confess that it may be nothing but an effect of being too close to the northerner during his conjurations. Until such time as I can determine what has happened to me I am going to keep it to myself.

As I must now make for the wheeldeck I am unable to write any further. The Maturi waits for my attendance and once this expedition has been completed I will be returning to my regular duties. I will leave what happens today to be recorded in tomorrow's entry.



Day One hundred and eighty-four

The day has started with fine weather but I find myself with much to think on and little time to fully understand what has happened to me. With only three days remaining until departure the Fleet is a hive of activity as final preparations are being completed. Unlike most who now labour at their allotted tasks I am now privy to the dangers that lay before us and have been instrumental in their uncovering. It would seem that Shalengael may have gone but he has left a legacy that still determines our future.

Upon putting down my quill in the morning past I went to meet with the Maturi Hedj and found both the Shadar Len and Captain Duschet himself in attendance. The Maturi's quarters are not large but a table had been set in the centre of his room and laid upon it was a chart of the waters ahead of us. It is unfortunate but most of the writings of Caren'thal relating to this part of our journey have been lost. We know the New World lies ahead but what exists between ourselves and these legendary lands is unknown. Large blank spaces on the chart are a testament to this lack of knowledge and as I entered I could see that this was the subject of the earnest conversation they were engaged in. All talk ceased as I made my presence known.

For the Maturi there seemed little reason to delay our expedition. With a large canvas bag already packed at his feet he took the lead, gathering his three companions as he made for the door. Today, he proclaimed, we would determine the course that must be set to reach the New World. I had no idea what he meant but let him lead the way. Although I had thought the expedition would be purely exploratory in nature it seemed the Maturi had determined a specific

agenda for our small group. At that time I could not know what it was, but with this mystery in mind eagerly followed the Dwarvendim as he made his way ashore.

It took a little less than an hour to reach the high citadel. Since recovering from my injuries I had been required to stay aboard and this expedition was my first chance to see the changes wrought within the city at close quarters. It is fair to say that most of the city remains in the state we found it. Ruined buildings and centuries of neglect are difficult to erase but the centre of the city has been reborn. Where ruination once ruled there now stands the kernel of a new settlement and from within the smashed walls and broken streets has arisen a town worthy of those who are to remain behind. It is amazing to see the way the industry of the peoples of the Fleet has been focused to this task. With streets cleared and new white walls glaring in the sunlight it is not hard to see that we will be leaving these settlers with the best opportunity to survive whatever circumstances may arise in our absence. Apart from the final roofing of a new civic hall there is little that still needs to be done. It is a credit to all who have laboured so hard.

As we reached the stairway to the citadel I felt the first pangs of a desire to go no further. I could not tell if it was some memory of my fall that made me falter, or if my new-found powers were telling me to choose caution. In the end it was a quiet word from the Maturi that got me moving. There was, he said, nothing that we might encounter ahead that could possibly cause me harm. On this he could be trusted. Together we made our way onto the stairs.

The ascent proved less of a labour than I had expected. Without the added burden of the Surveyor's equipment the rising levels were far easier to traverse, and some quick repair work done by the Dwarvendim had made the steps easily navigable. When we reached the upper landing and entered the citadel proper I found that the Dwarvendim had indeed been hard at work. In the time given to them they could not have returned the citadel to its former glories. Instead they had rebuilt the collapsed walls and turned the fortress into a redoubt that would provide at least some protection if the settlers ever found themselves in need of a sanctuary. Large wooden doors had also been hung upon both sides of the entrance and a

wooden battlement secured upon the western wall to provide some ability to defend the gates. All in all they had built an effective last defence for the settlers. Who could possibly attack them in the isolation of the Midreach was unknown but it seems necessary that such works should be in place. The truth is that none of us can know how far the reach of the Enemy might ultimately extend, and any defence must be better than none.

The Keep stands as a high tower at the centre of the citadel. An open entrance faces the main gates and with the Maturi still at the lead we moved quickly inside. Within the tower it proved to be very dark, on its lowest levels it has no windows or ventilation and in the gloom we stopped for a moment to light torches and organise ourselves for a descent into darkness. The stairwell that reached into the stone of the hill lay at the centre of the Keep's lowest level and with torches in hand we made our way down. The Maturi took the lead, followed by the Captain, myself and then the Shadar Len. In a tight spiral the stairs descended, the width of the stairwell no more than four metres. With torches flickering before us we moved carefully into the dark, taking each step tentatively until we came to a wide landing. To one side of this platform was an archway that opened out into a long corridor. I am unsure as to whether any of our party had been within the Temple before but the Maturi made his way confidently through a series of passages before finding a large domed cavern. It was here that the object of our expedition was to be found.

Like everything else that we had encountered, the Keep and the Temple beneath it were devoid of any decoration or artifice. Smooth clean walls spoke of technical skill and impressive engineering, and there was no doubt that the builders of all these ruins were sophisticated and skilled beings. The pool however, was a completely different thing. It was somehow out of place in a world of clean lines and precision, a piece of exquisite art that could not have possibly been the work of the architects who had fashioned the Temple it resided in. Here stood a paradox and a mystery, and I could not help but think of the last paradox we had encountered on our voyage; the island of Amen'wraith.

Sitting in the centre of the cavern it stood very much as Ahlek had described. Highly decorated and filled with the strange liquid, it felt so resoundingly out of place that I stood for a time trying to find some clue as to why it might have been put there. Thankfully the Maturi Hedj had the answers to these questions.

Only the four of us stood within the cavern and in the dark our torches flickered with a feeble light that barely illuminated the pool and its immediate surrounds. When I looked at it closer I realised that to call it a pool was misleading. To myself it looked more like a well, an opening into something deep and unfathomable and I was quickly to be proven correct. The Maturi took centre-stage in the drama that unfolded and I can record here that in that drama I played my part as well.

In the all-encompassing dark the Maturi approached the pool and motioned for me to move closer. Both the Captain and the Shadar Len stayed in the shadows. It was as we stood in the quiet that the Maturi asked me if I still had the pendant made of black stone. As it happened I had placed the pendant about my neck on the day he had given it to me and had not removed it. When I took it from about my neck I was amazed to see that it had changed. Rather than the polished black obsidian that had been given to me it was now clear, a perfect droplet of flawless crystal. With the pendant in hand he laid it carefully into the liquid in the pool and then stood back.

It is difficult to describe exactly what happened next. As we waited in the dark the Maturi explained what he had done and why. It was his contention that the pool was indeed something very precious. In the dialects of his ancient home the artefact was a neyus'im'haram, a Well of Infinite Possibility, one of the most important gifts that could be bestowed upon travellers unsure of their way. Within the depths of the Well dwelt the power to conjure every possible outcome of a traveller's chosen course, every consequence, every fork in the road that might lead to either success or disaster. All it took to unlock the Well was the power of the Gaels, and in his foresight Shalengael had provided that power. He had given it to me, and the Maturi Hedj had drawn it from me with the obsidian pendant.

For a short time there was silence and I must confess that when at first nothing happened I started to consider the idea that the Maturi

might be mistaken. I was of course very wrong. In the gloom it was difficult to see anything at first but then the carved surround of the well started to transform itself.

The entire surface of the well was carved as a complete representation of a simple forest scene, of trees and undergrowth captured in a moment of stillness. As a simple carving it could have been considered magnificent but it was much more than that. Within the depths of the trees could be found many animals and birds of the forest, all caught in motion, their backdrop the shadows and arching branches of a spreading canopy above. If you chose to look carefully it was possible to see deep within the trunks as if the scene extended into the distance. It was a beautiful piece of work that could hold you entranced within the cunning artistry of its form, but that was not its purpose. Imperceptibly it was coming to life before us.

As if a wind gusted through their many branches the trees began to move, bending slightly as the undergrowth and grasses at their roots rippled and whipped in the supernatural bluster. The animals and birds disappeared only to return as fleeting images between trunk and foliage, and with each passing moment the upper reaches of the forest began to grow, spreading out beyond the borders of the well, twisting and forming themselves into a wide bowl of endlessly changing branches. Within this bowl the liquid that had been quiet changed also. From its rest it arose as a sphere of perfectly black water, floating just above the constantly transforming branches of the forest below. Then the sphere began to ripple, a series of waves running across its surface.

Quickly the Maturi motioned everyone closer. I remember distinctly that he had to shout at the Captain. He was awe-struck by what he was seeing and in those moments of transformation did not respond to the Dwarvendim's whispered command. Hesitantly he took his place as the Maturi directed us to each stand upon one of four dark-coloured squares of stone. Each of our party stood at a point of the compass, surrounding the sphere as it hung suspended in the air before us. None of us could imagine what would happen next.

From within the centre of the sphere there came the slightest glimmer of blue flame. Like a light ascending to the surface of a deep ocean it grew and took on form, becoming clearer as it gathered power from

within. Quickly the light engulfed the sphere, shining out, illuminating the entire chamber. It was only then that I noticed the roof of the cavern was a perfect dome. That realisation came to us all at the same instant, and in that moment the light speared upwards from the sphere in a column of colour and movement that washed across the curved ceiling. Images appeared, blurred at first but then sharper and identifiable. We all gasped as it became clear that we were watching the Fleet at sea, sailing into the west.

Without respite the images increased in frequency. In a surge of light and colour we saw the destruction of the Dromannion played out a hundred times, each showing a different end, each providing a set of choices that could be made that would lead to failure and death for the Fleet. Fire and groundings, attacks by the Behemoths, of Kreel and other denizens of the seas flashed before our eyes. Pinnacles of stone rose swiftly beneath our ships, crushing and impaling our vessels as their complements were thrown into dark waters. Storms arose before us and disease swept our number, taking all in a multitude of brutal and senseless ways. It was an overpowering explosion of information and consequences that made no sense, but within the waves of imagery a single theme began to unveil itself, a subtle idea that became clearer as we stood assaulted by the power of the well. There was only one way to reach the New World without suffering the terrible consequences that were being played out before us. To find sanctuary we must go into the north-west and find the Sentinels of the Ashgard. It was only from there that we would find our way to the New World. All other paths would lead to disaster.

Its message given the sphere dissolved away, the moving stone of the well returning to a state of rest. In the cavern we stood quiet, all our minds filled with the images generated by the sphere. It did not pass by any of us as we stood dumbfounded by what we had seen that within the fleeting images had been endless scenes of our own deaths, and of carnage and destruction that left us without any doubt of how we might chart our voyage to the New World.

As we turned for the corridors that would take us back to the surface I noticed the Maturi scoop the obsidian pendant from the surface of the well and return it to his robes. He did not offer it to me and I must say that I did not want it. Nobody said a word as we made our way back to the world of light.

Day One hundred and eighty-five

This is our last full day ashore. Departure for the Fleet has been ordered for first light tomorrow and those of us that have not been burdened with last-minute tasks have been given leave to enjoy the island for one final time. For all the reasons described in this record I have had little opportunity to venture beyond the confines of the harbour and its ruins, and when given the chance to join a party of my fellow Assistants on an expedition into the southern forests I could not decline. The chance for fresh air and a bracing walk into the forests of Auren'dael seemed a fitting end to my time here. Ahead lay months of travel, without hope of landfall, and we were all going to make this last day one to be remembered.

Ahlek had heard from some of the Dwarvendim that a lake could be found only a short distance into the forests to the south, fed by cascades and surrounded on all sides by lush vegetation and a small stone beach. It was there, he assured us, that we would find a fitting place to spend our last hours ashore. None could see any reason to dispute this and in the mid-morning we set off, loaded with food and drink, our intention to idle away what time we had left to us in a state of relaxation and merriment. Just as we were about to disembark the Shadar Len approached and asked if he might join us. Today he also had been separated from his burdens and wished to make the trek as well. On such a fine day we could think of no reason to say no, and with the Dwarvendim Shadar in tow began our small expedition.

To find the forests of the south required first a long walk along the southern reaches of the harbour. On all sides the ruins are bordered by hills and sea and to escape these boundaries it is necessary first to make for the shallow hills that sit in the south. Within these slopes can be found an old road that winds a path through the hills, and then opens onto a broad plain which in turn spreads into the forests of Auren'dael. Ahlek had said that the lake was only a short distance away but this proved quickly to be inaccurate. By the time we had made it beyond the hills it was nearly midday and it had become clear that the forests stood at least a further hour's walk into the south. Our high spirits, and complete determination to have a good time, left little energy for recrimination. The sky was the clearest blue, the twin

suns shining in a sky devoid of cloud or bluster, and with our goal clearly set we trekked our way across the wide grasses.

I have never been one for the exertion of journeying great distances on foot, my life having been spent in the pursuit of my craft. Those times that I have been required to travel have always necessitated the use of a wagon or carriage. I found quickly on our walk that I do not have the stamina for such exertions and it was to my great relief that we found the edge of the forest in the hour after midday. There we rested for a time before moving on. The lake resided only a short distance within the trees and was large enough that it proved easy to find without the need for a search. The loud murmur of its cascades provided a natural signpost to its location and in the mirror of its tranquil waters we set up our pavilion.

Ahlek had taken the time to procure a tent from which all but the canvas roofing had been removed. Beneath this shade we placed out our food and drink and in the warm air of a bright afternoon settled to take our ease. In this fashion we whiled away the remaining hours of daylight; eating, laughing and swimming in the cool waters of the lake. As we relaxed other groups also arrived and soon the stony beach was crowded with those that had leave to go ashore. It was a great day, one that I will remember long after we have left Auren'dael. To simply do nothing but relax in the warmth of a mild afternoon, engaging in easy conversation without the urgency of pressing duties was a balm for us all, one that was hard to see the end of. The lowering of the suns in the west could not be ignored and it was with some regret that we packed our gear and pulled down the pavilion. There was however, the matter of returning to the city and it was in the receding hours of daylight that I found myself with the opportunity to speak with the Shadar Len.

It was as we were within sight of the hills that he strode up beside me. At first we spoke only on the activities of the day but both his curiosity and my own could remain subdued for only so long. First I enquired on his given name. Before becoming Shadar to the Maturi Hedj he was known to his family as Agrindel and for a time we both talked on our lives prior to the coming of the Enemy. He had been a slave, as had all the Dwarvendim, but early in his life had been chosen by his Elders to study as a Shadar with the only surviving Maturi of his people. It had been a hard existence in servitude to the Haarn but on

this he did not wish to say much, for him the only thing that now mattered was the future. The subject of the Maturi brought me to the one question I had been wanting to ask since our expedition to the Temple.

With the suns setting a wind had begun to ease its way out of the south and with the breeze at our shoulders I asked the Shadar how the Maturi had known about the Well of Infinite Possibility, and how he had come to know that I held the power to use it. Agrindel paused only to ensure that no-one else could hear him become he replied. The answer he said was simple. Shalengael had left a letter prior to his disappearance. He had placed it away in the Maturi's belongings, in a cunning fashion that would ensure the Dwarvendim could find it only after the Gael's leaving. Within its words were exact directions as to what to do when we arrived in the Midreach and where to find the power needed to activate the well. It seemed that the Gael's ability to divine the future had proven potent indeed.

What was more interesting was the Shadar's views on the well itself. He had learned from his master that it was in fact an extension of the Gael's ability to see the consequences of all actions as a continuous thread of cause and effect. In Agrindel's mind it was no wonder that so many of the Gaels faltered under the weight of such prescience. Without a disciplined mind the confusion of choice and consequence given by their powers must have seemed overwhelming. He was glad that such a gift was not his to control.

We talked for most of the remainder of the walk back to the city, and I believe that in that time we became friends. In the light of Elanna and Shabel our party retraced its way back through the hills and then into the illuminated harbour. Already aboard the ships of the Fleet the night watches were making final preparations for departure. Within the long lines of vessels the Dromannion stood out, its lanterns and braziers outlining a ship far larger than those that rode at anchor about it. In the cool of the evening our ship rose and fell to a light swell that had all the Fleet restless, like dogs baying for release from their leashes. Tomorrow we must leave this place. I will be sad to go but our fate lies in the west, and I can only hope that Providence will look kindly upon those that are to remain.

*D*ay One hundred and eighty-six

We have all been awoken at first light to the striking of the Dromannion's bell and the signals for all ships to make sail. Along the shoreline those who have now made Auren'dael home have gathered to say their farewells, and in the cool of the morning a stiff easterly has blown up, filling our sails and turning us to the west. The smaller ships of the Fleet are to make for the harbour entrance first, then spread to the north and south as the Dromannion and the Avernell clear the seawalls. We are leaving this place with a reduced complement, and less three small ships that are to remain as transport for the settlers to the other two inhabitable islands of Clan'dael. The Captains and crews of these vessels have also chosen to remain behind. There is sadness in this parting but also hope that all will meet once again. Now however, we are to be separated and as I watch the people ashore I wonder what hardships will confront them as they try to build a new life upon these islands. I wish them success.

For us however the next leg of our journey must now begin. Ahead is the vagaries of the wild seas and the prospect of no further landfall until we reach the New World. Once again we have become a small world of humanity in a wasteland of moving water, but the wind is at our backs and our course is known. Across the leagues ahead of us lies the Sentinels of the Ashgard and a safe passage to the sea beyond. This is to be our fate and we will meet it as it may come.

Before I must begin my duties I should record one final item. Those of us that stood in the Temple and used the power of Shalengael to activate the well believe that his powers have now dissipated, lost like himself to the winds. I can write here that this is not so. I feel the energy of his gift still within me, flowing like a faint breeze through the core of my being. Whatever the Gael might have seen in our future still requires the exercise of his power. There is something ahead that solid ships and skilled crews cannot overcome alone. Of this I am certain.

Beyond the Sentinels of the Ashgard



*D*ay Two hundred and three

It is now more than two weeks since we passed out of sight of the Midreach, and in this wide ocean I have seen little of note or circumstance that might be worthy of record in this journal. The weather has remained fine and we have been blessed with a variable wind from the east that has kept us moving steadily towards the New World. The routine of the ship continues, and with our reduced complement the difficulties of our voyage have eased considerably. No longer are we pressed for space and with the easing of that restriction we have all found our duties lightened.

On this two hundred and third day of our travels into the west I find myself with time to spare, my duties complete and an afternoon available that is mine to command. I have chosen to do nothing except sit upon the foredeck, and enjoy what may be one of the last of the few remaining warm days of our voyage. It has been noted by more than one of the denizens of this vessel that the days are becoming progressively shorter, and that with their truncation they have become cooler as well. Since our leaving of the Midreach the seasons have been sharp in their adjustment, the onset of the winter far more defined than might otherwise be expected at sea. Providence has, however, blessed us with fine skies and tinged the clear blue with the first hints of a cold season to come.

In preparation for the new season the crewmen aboard have been hard at work providing for themselves the extra clothing required. It is amazing to watch as they turn remnants of canvass, discarded clothing, and ordinary tar into new cold-weather gear. Although the passengers of this vessel will be able to retreat to the shelter that can be found below decks, the crew have no similar luxury, and they have been diligent in the provision of everything they will need to remain warm and dry.

The cold may be coming but there has been no lessening in our commitment to finding the New World. With the establishment of the settlement at Auren'dael the last of any hesitation has been left far behind as well. All now aboard are here because of their decision to continue and there remains no undercurrent of malcontent. We all have the one purpose and function the better for it.

And in that purpose we have made considerable progress. Since leaving the Midreach we have covered more than eight hundred leagues and I can report that this great distance has been achieved without mishap or loss of ship. It is a truth that we have no knowledge of how far our destination might lay ahead of us but we all know that the Sentinels of the Ashgard must be our first objective. Such is the uncertainty of what lies ahead that we do not even know what they might be, nor what we will confront when we do find them.

Although I have mentioned previously that the past seventeen days have been without incident worth recording, that is not altogether true. Now that I have the time to sit and write with more ease there are a few things that should be noted in this record. The first may not seem of much importance as it relates to the strength of the Dwarvendim, but I must relate some indication of their capabilities now. The feeling is strong within me that we will come to rely on their strength very soon.

It is true that since the rescue of the Dwarvendim I have noted on more than one occasion in this journal about the sturdy physical presence of these men and women. Whatever they may lack in physical height has been compensated for in the power that they can bring to any manual task asked of them. It is a strange paradox that can be found within their number. They hold a deep devotion to their customs and rituals, and exhibit all the signs of great intelligence, yet they have been imbued with a strength that equals the sum of three ordinary men. I have seen them carrying yard-arms and water barrels that would have taken two men to transport, and then take to the rigging of the Dromannion with such a fine balance that you would think they had been doing it their whole lives. Such capabilities have been noted by the Captain, and because of this a number of volunteers from the ranks of the Dwarvendim have been taken into service as crewmen.

The second item of note on this day is the emergence of a most strange phenomena that has become all the more frequent in the past days. Upon the surface of the ocean we have begun to see huge floating islands of vegetation, mostly seaweed and other sea-plants, that have come together in imposing rafts of dull greenery. Most are small, but a few we have passed in the last few days have been massive in their extent, and it is possible that if a ship was to hit one in the dark hours of the night it could do great damage. All night watches have been doubled in consequence of this, and I have been told that I will be returning as an extra hand to the dogwatch if it turns out that the seaweed islands do become a greater hazard.

The islands have proven to be a great curiosity however. Within an ocean of undulating water they are an unusual distraction. Some rise to more than twenty metres above the surface, and the largest that has been sighted extended for more than one hundred and fifty metres on its longest reach. Apart from the mass of vegetation these floating rafts have also been shown to be alive with bird and other animal life. In particular there is a large crab-like creature that inhabits the wet boundaries of the islands that seems to hold dominion over each small floating world. Quickly they have been named as "Crawlers", and multitudes of these creatures seem to populate each of the larger islands. I cannot say if they are a danger, or simply a docile crustacean that has found a comfortable niche within the matted weeds, but some are as large as a metre in length, with pincers to match. I should not wish to be confronted by one of them.

On these strange islands the words of Caren'thal the Younger are silent. There is nothing in the records of the Dwarvendim that make mention of these curiosities, and for the moment it has been decided that the Fleet should steer well clear of them all.

Day Two hundred and four

This morning has begun in uproar and mystery. Four men of the night watch have gone missing, and with the discovery of their absence the ship is being searched from steerage to forecastle. Patches of blood have been found upon the foredeck but there is no indication of the

men's fate otherwise. I can record here that the Captain is furious, and has ordered that all persons aboard make account of their whereabouts over the night hours to the Master of the Watch. I believe in his mind he believes that no-one aboard is to blame, the fact of his men's disappearance cannot be ignored however. What makes the disappearance even more mysterious is that a good twenty men were on the weather-decks at the time, and none heard or saw anything.

With the fate of the men remaining unresolved, the Captain has changed the routine of the ship. All night watches have now been doubled, and this has meant that I must return to my position on the dogwatch. I can say that it will not be an onerous duty, I will enjoy the small piece of solitude that the crowsnest provides, but I cannot say yet if I will be required to watch the ocean at our four quarters, or instead keep an eye on the decks themselves. It is something that will no doubt be instructed before I take the long climb to the nest.

Apart from the uproar surrounding the missing men the remainder of the day has passed without further incident. The weather remains fine and a strengthening wind keeps us tracking westwards. My duties as a Healer's Assistant remain unchanged and I have found that with the reduced complement aboard more time is now being applied to our training. To this end Faren has taken space within the second level of the foredeck to institute a library, one that holds all the books of the Haarn and his own personal trove of medical texts and literature. A collection has also been taken from throughout the ship and further manuscripts and books have been added. The Healer is well pleased with the outcome of his endeavours, and has given permission for all who wish to take advantage of the library. The Assistants are now required to spend some time each day in study and research and it has proven a valuable diversion from our normal duties.

As I write I can see the first signs of a storm gathering in the east, and the rotund form of the Master of the Watch coming towards me. It would seem that my time on the dogwatch is about to begin.

*D*ay Two hundred and eight

Four days have now passed beneath overcast skies and the steady onslaught of rain and strong winds. Although the weather presents no danger to the Fleet, it has been a constant that has drained the resolve of our crews as they battle to keep the Dromannion on course. In the swell raised by the powerful winds the ship keeps to its westerly track, its bow biting deep into the waves as it forces its way forwards. Stinging spray and tides of cold water attack everyone who must remain above decks, and through the veils of rain there is little that can be seen. The Fleet remains only as vague shapes about us as we keep to our track and within the mists and rain all available eyes are ever watchful for hazards ahead. I have had little opportunity to emerge from below decks but the one time I was required has reminded me what a dismal experience such weather can be.

A ship in the midst of a drenching rain is a cold, uncomfortable world, one where even the most mundane of tasks can become a test of strength and agility. On this day that test came with a call for two Assistants to help with the removal below of an injured crewman. He had been swept from the foredeck and thrown into the middeck lifeboat davits. A broken arm and collar-bone were the costs of his misfortune and it fell to myself and Ahlek Norahm to retrieve him below.

Armed only with a stretcher and the need to move quickly we arose from the middeck galley hatch and made quickly for the injured man. Upon a heaving deck we soon found ourselves skidding across the slick surface of the decking before coming to rest in an ungainly jumble against a port ballista mounting. Our haste had almost sent us overboard but we could not make the mistake again. Carefully we found footing against the ship's bounding deck and worked our way carefully to where the injured man lay tended by a number of his fellow crew.

Upon our arrival those that had stayed with him returned to their duties. I was not a little surprised to see that the injured man was Michals, the sailor who had given me the blackroot upon my first dogwatch in the crowsnest. He recognised me as well and smiled

through the pain of his injury. Carefully we placed him aboard the stretcher and secured his body to its frame. There was no way that we might carry him so instead he was dragged across the deck towards the galley hatch. Quickly he was returned to warmer accommodation and the Healer went to work, resetting his bones and stabilising his pain. It was only after we had got Michals below that Ahlek noticed I had suffered an injury myself, a broken finger that had gone unnoticed as we struggled to get the man below decks. In the desperate cold I had not noticed as all my fingers had gone numb. I will have to be more careful.

Day Two hundred and nine

Today has turned to fine weather and a shift in the wind to the north. Against this change the ships of the Fleet now tack into the wind, their paths a criss-crossing ballet of vessels as they slowly make headway against the bluster. Aboard the Dromannion our lives continue to the well practised constant of our routine, and I can report that the circumstances of my accommodation has improved as well. All those of our number who were removed to the Capstan Well on the last leg of our voyage have been relocated to more spacious accommodation within the second level of the foredeck. Faren has ensured that we have easy access to the library and far more space for living quarters. After the constrictions of the Well it has proven a great relief for all of us.

The improvement in our living conditions has highlighted the benefits that has come from the establishment of the settlement at Auren'dael. At this time we have five hundred and sixty souls aboard, some sixty less than we started with on our flight from the Old World, and three hundred and eighty less than when we arrived at the Midreach. Such a reduction in complement has meant an easing on our workload, but has also brought forward the consideration that there are now too many Assistants aboard the Dromannion for the work required. There are other ships in the Fleet that have none, and we have been told that there is a chance that at least four will be transferred to ships in the Kalborean fleet. It is a prospect I do not relish, but one that will have to be accepted if it proves to be my fate.

I can record here that the finger I had broken in the days past has healed completely. Although it is an injury that should have taken weeks to mend, the speed of its healing only underlines my suspicion that Shalengael's magic is still strong within me. At this time I do not wish to bring further attention to myself, it has been generally accepted that his power left me at the Well of Infinite Possibility and I see no reason to engender further curiosity just yet. The finger has been strapped and held immovable since its treatment and I have decided to give no indication of its healing. If indeed there lay obstacles ahead that require the use of the northerner's power, I will have it available when it is needed.

I should also note here that the voices have returned to my dreams. In the past week I have felt the energies of Shalengael's magic growing more insistent in the night hours. It has not yet manifested again as an ability to create the faint blue light, however I believe that the power was only diminished by its use at the Well, and that it has now begun to recover itself. I cannot say how it will next manifest but it is my hope that it will remain hidden until it is needed.

As I write it is the hour before sunset and I again find myself with a small amount of time for relaxation. The ocean extends to all the horizons and is unblemished, except for the wakes of our vessels and the infrequent passing of one of the seaweed islands. In the past days these floating rafts of weed have been only small and unremarkable in extent, however the watches have remained vigilant and we continue to give them a wide berth.

Before I go for a meal I should record also that news has reached us of two more men having disappeared, this time from the decks of the Castaal. There is no consideration that these losses are related to our own, for Captain Wilbrims it appears that an accident of some type occurred in the night and they were lost to the sea. It does seem more than just coincidence but the Captains know their craft and I am happy to leave such worries to them.



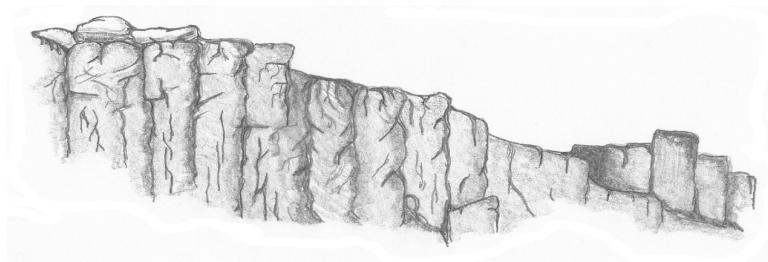
*D*ay Two hundred and eleven

Today has seen the return of a Behemoth to the north of the Fleet. It was spotted at first light maintaining a parallel course to our ships and appeared only as a series of dark, undulating peaks within the waves. At its first sighting a new plan has been put into effect to ensure the safety of the Fleet. Rather than waiting for the beast to attack, it has been decided to maintain a more aggressive posture.

Two of the ships of our number, the Handou and the Calwey, have been fitted with specialised ballista that throw smaller versions of the charges that were used previously to such lethal effect against the Behemoth. These ships are small and light before the wind, and have been given the charge of chasing off the monsters before they develop the inclination to cause harm amongst us. In this duty the two ships have been diligent.

I have watched as the morning progressed as the ships assailed the beast with their explosive charges, hurling them into the water and watching as great plumes of water erupted into the air. I believe that there is no intention to harm the Behemoth, it seems unworthy to destroy such a beast if it is not necessary, but the attention of the ships has driven it off. Hopefully it will be the last we will see of it.

The remainder of the day has progressed without further events of note. The sea is rising in a deeper swell and there is a hint in the east of weather to come. We continue to make good progress however, only the more frequent passing of the weed islands a strange, yet benign distraction from the endless ocean before us.



*D*ay Two hundred and twelve

This day has begun with the news that another five men have gone missing from the Fleet. All were somehow taken in the night watch, and there is evidence now that they were taken violently. To counter this unknown threat Captain Duschet has ordered extra navigation lights be installed and a constant watch from the crowsnest instituted to survey the decks during the night hours. There have been no more men taken from the Dromannion, but in the past night three have disappeared from the Equinox and one man each from the Allahard and the Calwey. There is something stalking the Fleet, and it moves in the night with a silence that has left it unseen and free to take what it wishes.

For my part I have been rostered from this night forward to a full watch at the crowsnest. Until this threat is identified the Captain has decided to leave a third of his men on deck at all times, fully armed and vigilant for any sign of what might be out there.

To complicate matters we are at the mercy of light winds that keep us moving to the north-west but are unreliable in their bluster. For the moment though all eyes are focused on the sea itself, watching for whatever malevolent forces might be congregating within her depths.

*D*ay Two hundred and fourteen

This day has ended with a tale to record that in its tragedy and complexity is difficult to believe. As has been the case with previous days of conflict and death I will attempt to put to paper all that has transpired. It is a tale that is difficult to tell.

For the past two days we have sailed slowly westwards, our speed governed by sporadic winds and the gathering on the ocean of large numbers of the weed islands. Even though these matted agglomerations stood within our path we gave little heed to them. Most were small and with minor adjustments to our course were able to easily avoid them. It only became apparent that something was wrong when we found the ships of the Fleet coming to a halt ahead of

us. Quickly Captain Duschet brought the Dromannion to rest and with the remainder of the Fleet looked out over a huge barrier of weed islands that had somehow accumulated in the waters before us.

At first it was not considered a danger, just a strange manifestation of currents that were unfamiliar, and with the way forward blocked our Captain looked instead to what we needed to do to retreat and find a clearer way. It was as he was in earnest conversation with his officers that the stern watch reported movement in the islands at our rear. To our amazement the islands behind us were moving, slowly but surely closing what remained of the only exit from a tightening noose about the Fleet.

Realisation dawned quickly that we had sailed into a trap. The Captain was not about to wait and see what might happen next. With the Fleet being encircled there was no time to spare and quickly he ordered all the ballista crews to their stations. At the port side of the ship the ring of islands appeared at its weakest, and with a single command fired a salvo of bolts into the seaweed obstruction. In a huge explosion of rotting weed and seawater the bolts hit home, detonating against the island and breaking it into a floating morass of plant life. It was then that the true nature of these strange phenomena became fully known to us. They were not islands at all but nests, teeming with multitudes of the crustaceans we had come to know as Crawlers.

In a swarming tide the Crawlers emerged from their islands and came straight at us. Orders came fast from the wheeldeck and immediately the bolt-crews trained their weapons upon the nearest islands, unloading round after round into the teeming horde that now drew closer to the ships of the Fleet. Every ship that was armed took up the fight and in the calm of the midday a battle for survival began.

Those ships that were closest to the nests were the first to be surrounded. Like fortresses in a writhing sea the vessels were besieged, the Crawlers attempting to gain a foothold as those aboard desperately fought to keep them off the decks. From all sides the creatures advanced, their trap secure as they relentlessly closed upon us. It was only a matter of time before they reached the Dromannion.

In their multitudes the metre-long crustaceans fought to find a way on board but the steep sides of the ship's hull kept them floundering in the water as they struggled to find a purchase. From the gunwale the crew pushed the attackers off the sides of the ship with landing poles, but there were many of them and it was impossible to keep them all at bay. The first of the Crawlers made it over the bow of the ship and onto the foredeck before anyone could send it back into the sea. With pincers raised it charged at the nearest men, and more startled than anything else, they retreated from its attack. But it did not force its advantage, instead it scurried for the nearest gear mechanism that operated the forward port davits and released it. With a resounding crash the attached lifeboat fell into the waters below and began to drag at the side of the ship.

It was the Captain that realised what was happening first. In a frantic shout he ordered the lifeboat's ropes to be cut but it was too late. As quickly as a man might run on level ground a swarm of the Crawlers used the attached winching ropes to the lifeboat to gain access to the decks. Within a matter of a few heartbeats a dozen of the beasts were on the middeck, lashing out with their armoured pincers as they attempted to bring their fight to us.

I can say as I record these matters that I did not know what surprised me most; whether it was the speed with which they moved, or the intelligence they demonstrated in the tactics of their assault, but it was not the last of the surprises that these creatures were capable of. Most able bodied men were on decks by this time. Everybody else was below and the hatches locked, and in the melee that ensued it became quickly apparent that swords and wooden bludgeons were not effective against the hard armour of the Crawlers. Whilst the ballista crews attempted to blow a passage through the island barrier the fight on decks became all the more desperate. Men were falling as the creatures unleashed a new attack upon us and it was one we had little defence against.

From the ends of long whip-like protuberances at their tails the creatures were able to fling a tendril of sticky webbing with striking accuracy. A man caught by one of these lines could be pulled down and then hit a multitude of times by further strikes, rendering him immobile. Quickly we came to realise that this must have been what had happened to our missing crewmembers. But there was little time

to ponder this revelation. More of the creatures were finding their way aboard and an even greater danger now loomed before us.

From the edges of the wide circle of surrounding islands smaller pieces were dislodging themselves and making for the ships of the Fleet. Like siege engines being pushed against fortress walls the small islands were moving towards the sides of our ships. If they were given the chance to make contact there would be no stopping the crawler's advance and the Dromannion would be swarmed. Again orders came from the wheeldeck and the ballista crews brought their weapons to bear upon the advancing islands. In muffled detonations some were blown apart, but the sea was alive with them and it seemed only a matter of time before the Fleet would be overwhelmed.

It was in this dark moment that two events took place, one tragic, the other provident. From the south a stiff wind began to bluster and within its gusts the Dromannion gained the ability to manoeuvre. Within the new wind the ship could make headway and used it to force a passage through the swarming Crawlers towards the northern edge of the trap. I believe it was the Captain's intention to try and force a passage through the islands and create a gap through which the rest of the Fleet might escape. It was not what transpired.

Ahead lay a small ship named the Almane, and even through the frantic fighting on the decks I could see that it lay in deep distress. Almost engulfed in a seething mass of Crawlers it had drifted into the edge of the weed barrier and had gone aground. Overwhelmed by the creatures there seemed little chance that anyone might have survived, and in desperation the Captain made a fateful decision. From the manifests of the Fleet he knew that more than twenty-five souls resided aboard the vessel. In all likelihood they were now dead, but the Almane was the one ship in the Fleet that no-one wished to travel upon, and because of it only held a scant crew. It was the Fleet's powder-ship and within its almost empty holds there still resided two tonnes of explosive black powder. In that instant the fate of the Almane was decided.

Orders were made and the Captain himself took control of one of the quarterdeck ballistas. It was an action that he wished no other should hold responsibility for, and without hesitation shot a single bolt into the stern of the Almane. In a crushing detonation the

wheeldeck was blown to splinters and in its aftermath a fire began to rage aboard. It took less than a minute for the growing conflagration to reach the powder-holds.

In a blinding explosion the Almane erupted, its store of powder igniting in a single blast that fractured the island upon which it was grounded, and sent a shockwave rippling through the Dromannion as it sped as a physical strike outwards through the Fleet. It had done the job however. A gaping hole now lay in the barrier ahead and the Dromannion made straight for it. Behind our ship the remainder of the Fleet struggled to follow, and to a vessel they were able to make use of the southerly bluster to force a passage out of the trap. It was not the end of the fight though, and it was the Dwarvendim who turned the tide.

Stunned by the explosion the Crawlers faltered in their attack, but only for a moment. Upon the decks of the Dromannion dozens of the creatures remained, and even as we put distance between ourselves and the teeming multitudes, these creatures fought on, their purpose seemingly to create as much havoc as possible. Against their number we had no answer, our weapons ineffectual against their armoured hides. It was then that a sickening crash against the middeck brought all eyes to the starboard gunwale.

In the midst of the fighting a number of the Dwarvendim had gone below and returned with long metal bars. I recognised the bars as raw metal used by the blacksmith, and stored in the rough lengths for the purposes of his craft. With these weapons in hand the Dwarvendim went to work against our attackers. One by one the Dwarvendim advanced upon the Crawlers, and with all the strength at their disposal brought the ends of the heavy metal bars down in long arcing blows upon the armoured shells of the creatures. In a horrendous splintering thud their armour broke and the Crawlers fell. As one went down the next would be assaulted, and in a hail of blows would perish as a smashed mess upon the middeck. In this way the Dwarvendim cleared the creatures from the middeck and forced them forward to the forecastle and then off the ship all together.

Quickly the Dromannion flagged the other vessels of the Fleet and all who could tested the Crawlers with hard metal. By the late afternoon

the battle was done, the creatures repulsed from the Fleet and the seaweed islands left far to our rear. In the failing light we have been left to count our losses.

Day Two hundred and fifteen

In the morning of this day the Fleet has come to a halt, our purpose the counting of our number and the determination of our losses from the previous day. We have had no further sighting of the Crawlers, or of their floating nests, and with the security of a clear sea at our four quarters the Captains of the Fleet have begun their tallies.

It is known by all that the Fleet left the Midreach fifty-six ships strong, with a complement of over forty-six hundred souls aboard. In the battle one ship was lost, the Almane, but it is the number of missing people that must be quantified, and to that purpose we have lay at anchor as the manifests are determined. From what I have been able to gather from Faren the news has not been good.

By midday the tallies were complete, the numbers from each ship flagged to the Dromannion. Of our number two hundred and sixteen crew have been lost to the creatures, twenty-one from the Dromannion alone. Only Providence kept most of our number safe below decks, the action of those above deck stopping any incursions by the creatures into the corridors of the ships.

It is a truth that we do not know why these creatures chose to attack us. In our journey into the west we have been at the mercy of many forces, whether it be bad weather or the lumbering attentions of the Behemoths. Not since leaving the Old World however, have we been the subject of such ruthless and malevolent intelligence. It was a trap that was laid for us, and without the intervention of Providence it would have been our undoing. I can only assume that the depths of this great sea hold many dangers, the Crawlers one that from this point forward will be avoided.

To adjust for the losses sustained from the past day the Captain has called for further volunteers from the ship's complement to train as crew. To this call he has had some surprising answers. A further ten

passengers have come forward, and Captain Wilbrims of the Castaal has provided fifteen young men and women from the Kalborean ships as well. At the hour before dusk they came aboard and were greeted warmly into our number. To a man and women they were all tall and lean in appearance. Well suited, the Captain says, for work within the shrouds and sails of the Dromannion. They have been given quarters below the foredeck, and I have found that most will be my neighbours, having taken the rooms next to that of the Healer's Assistants.

This day has been long, filled with the sadness of that which has passed, and the uncertainty of a sea that seems to provide no end of surprises. As I write our ships ride to the north-west, a heavy swell before us. In the gathering dark I must pause and wonder at the nature of the world we are forging towards. We have left the Old World, and put behind us the Age of Reason that once gave surety to our lives. Ahead of us waits something far different. I can feel the change in the air, and sense within the waters themselves that the fundamental energies of the New World are different, and becoming stronger with every day that we move closer. I do not know if it is Shalengael's magic or simply the effects of so much unforeseen malice, but the feeling grows within me that the New World will not be the same as the one we have left behind.



*D*ay Two hundred and sixteen

A morning storm has left the Fleet dispersed widely upon the plunging waves. Against a strong wind and thrashing whitecaps the Dromannion rises and falls to the power of a growing swell, and we find ourselves once again focused to the tasks that will bring us to the New World. There has been no further sign of the Crawlers, or their great nests, and the belief has firmed that we have passed beyond their dominion.

Below decks the day has been a busy one. Many men were lost in the battle against the Crawlers but many more were injured, and we have

all been brought to the task of tending their needs. The most intractable of problems has proven to be the remains of the sticky tendrils used by the creatures to pull down their prey. Many of the injured were brought below with these tendrils hard against their skin and they have been very difficult to remove. By whatever means that they adhere, the effects have been a slow poisoning that does not improve until the substance is cut from the skin.

My day has been spent in the tending of these wounds. Faren has had to resort to a laborious surgery that slowly slices away the remaining tendrils until they are removed. It is not without pain or risk of infection, but thankfully we are fully stocked with the herbs and poultices required to treat the resulting wounds. At the time of writing this entry our Surgery is full and we have had to take additional space below the middeck to accommodate all those who now require treatment. Faren believes none of the afflicted crewman will be able enough for duty for at least ten days.

Although the treatment of these injured crew has been the focus of my day I must record two specific events that have occurred during the night past. The first relates to the return of the unknown creatures whose breathing I have written about previously. Just prior to retiring for the night, I spent a short time on the foredeck, watching the bow of the Dromannion cutting through the waves before the rising winds. Somewhere within the rush of the wind and the deep push of the ship, I heard the same inhalation and exhalations that so reminded me of a potter's bellows. Luckily the Officer of the Watch was close and I called him to listen also. Sure enough the bellows sounded clearly within the noises of our passage. Unfortunately we could see nothing that might give a clue to its origin, but the Officer said that he would inform the Captain of what he had heard nonetheless. After our entrapment by the Crawlers anything of note is to be passed on, no matter how incidental.

The second event was more personal in nature and underlines the growing potency of Shalengael's magic as it hides within me. After listening for a return of the bellows I spent a further time watching the waves and thinking on what lays ahead. Lost in my thoughts I did not realise that the power of Shalengael was working its magic on the waves beneath me. Only as I brought my focus to the water streaming

beside the hull of the Dromannion did I see a line of disturbed water following the movement of my hand as I leant against the foredeck balustrade. At first I did not realise it for what it was until I deliberately moved my hand in an arc across the waters. It was as if I had my hand in the water, forcing it to part in a rapid wake that forked one way out into the swell, the other against the hull of the Dromannion. In that short period I found that I could extend my will to disturb the water in any way I saw fit, turning it one way or the other, or creating small eddies that swirled within the waves themselves. All this I did in solitude. Against the rising swell my efforts went unnoticed and then, as quietly as it encroached upon my thoughts, the power dissipated. It has not returned since.

There is little doubt now in my mind that the northerner's power is growing within me. I cannot say for what purpose this might be, however I shall continue to say nothing of it. Whether I can keep such a power secret for much longer is another question. The Maturi Hedj has been spending a lot of time within the Surgery, and I have noticed both himself and the Shadar Len keeping a discreet watch upon me. I believe the Maturi understands far more than he lets on, and I have realised over time that the Dwarvendim never said exactly what the letter from Shalengael fully revealed. The need to use the Well of Infinite Possibility may have been only a part of the destiny foretold by the Gael, and it is in my mind that there may be much more that has been left unsaid. Indeed, it may be that I will find that I have no secrets, and that the Maturi knows far more than I.

*D*ay Two hundred and seventeen

On this Two hundred and seventeenth day of our voyage a strong wind continues from the south, our passage westwards a constant battle against the heaving power of the sea. It has been a hard day, overcast and mixed within grey veils of rain and mist. Beneath us the decks move with the constant rise and fall of the waves, and we have found no respite from the cold that now intensifies with every surge in the wind. Extra clothing has been distributed to all aboard and most of the ship below decks has been battened down to keep what warmth we have secure.

For myself and Ahlek today has been one of rest. The Captain has instituted a new roster of duties which allows every crew-member and passenger one day per fortnight for personal rest and recreation. It has been my fate that my first day without the burden of duties should be one such as this. The only consolation I have found has been the company of Ahlek, his dry humour more than a match for the encroaching cold. We have spent the day in idleness, the hours quickly lost in the telling of tall tales and the endless dissection of ship gossip. It has been altogether a fruitless day but one that I have enjoyed nonetheless.

Apart from my conversations with the young Assistant I have found some additional diversion in what can be seen from the only porthole in our quarters. Within the clouds of mist and rain there runs at our starboard the indistinct shape of the Faehlan, a Kalborean ship that must rate as one of the smallest amongst our number. Barely twenty meters in length, it rides the waves in what seems to be a state of constant peril, the turbulent rise and fall of the swell threatening at each surge of the sea to swallow the ship in its embrace.

From our small vantage on the Dromannion I have watched as the crew aboard the Faehlan battle the relentless seas. It has proved both fascinating and inspiring to be an observer as the men who crew her struggle to keep the ship afloat and in good order. How such a small vessel has endured the rigours of our voyage so far serves as a testament to their skill and their determination. It has proven a sobering reminder of how fortunate I am to be aboard the flagship of our Fleet.

*D*ay Two hundred and eighteen

The bad weather has diminished, but still the winds blow strongly from the south. Within the confines of our wooden ships we look out at the ocean that surrounds us, and all that is to be seen is an overcast sky and the surging waters of the Grey Sea. At all quarters the horizon has disappeared in a hazy boundary that melds seamlessly in a great arc about us, and within this small existence the ships of the Fleet plough forward.

The routine of the Dromannion continues, and our duties remain as they have been. The care of the injured crewmen has become our main concern, and although we must still find time for our usual morning surgery hours, and afternoon excursions through the ship, we spend most time with them. The wounds left by the crawler's tendrils are difficult to treat and many have become infected. For two of the crew such infections have proven impossible to combat. Both were buried at sea this morning. For the rest of the injured we have had better results but it will be many days yet before any of the afflicted will be fit to leave our care. I can report here also, that Michals is doing very well. He has left the Surgery but remains without duties. He still has at least three weeks before he will be fit to return to work.

At midday today a meeting was called regarding the well-being of the NomDruse. Since the disappearance of Shalengael they have retreated to their Cresh, and without the authority of his presence seem unwilling to leave the confines of their quarters. I believe there is more to this behaviour than Shalengael's ability to speak with them, and coax them out. They seem healthy but find it exceedingly difficult to leave the security of their sanctuary. Although it has been discounted by most of the other Healers it is in my mind that the children have suffered greatly, and as a result of the events at Corin'kraag have developed an affliction of the will that has drawn them inwards. The northerner was their only source of security and now he has gone. I am not sure how such an illness might be treated.

I can say truthfully that the absence of Shalengael is being felt by more than the NomDruse alone. His power continues to grow within me and I am finding it difficult to ignore. In the quiet of the night the voices have returned and sleep has become elusive. As others rest my thoughts have become one with a host of voices that engage in endless conversation, in languages that I do not understand, and on subjects that seem to require endless discourse. When I do sleep there is no respite, and within an ocean of thought and memory I see things that leave me cold with terror. If this has been the lot of the Gaels, to find every moment of their lives woven with the memories of the past and the possibilities of the future, then it is a price too high to pay. I see it only as a precursor to madness.

Finding a good night's sleep is not my only pressing concern though. In the past days the Shadar Len has continued to keep a discreet watch upon me, and although I consider him a good friend it is becoming wearing. I have no doubt that he works at the behest of the Maturi Hedj, however I believe that they might find out more if they were but to ask me what they want to know. It is difficult indeed to go about one's duties when at every glance you find an earnest pair of eyes fixed stolidly upon you. If this behaviour continues much longer I feel I will have no recourse but to confront the Shadar and determine what it is the Maturi actually wants.

Day Two hundred and nineteen

Fine conditions have returned to the Fleet and with a light wind at our backs the Dromannion rides the waves under full sail. The duties of our day continue, however there have been a few notable happenings, not the least an approach from the Shadar Len for another meeting with the Maturi Hedj. It is a curious timing that sees the Maturi requesting a meeting on the day that I have decided to confront them regarding their constant surveillance. The Shadar Len was most polite in his request and a time has been set for tomorrow morning. It will be good to find out what is going on.

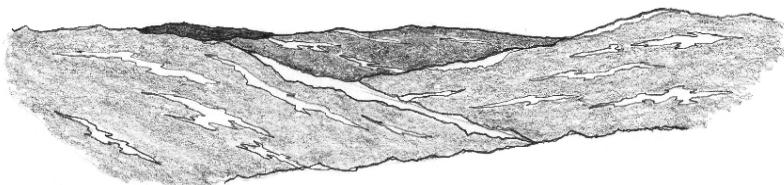
The voices have not left me, and I fear that they are now a permanent addition to my thoughts. Since their return I have found the melee of voices and languages a constant backdrop to the night, but I find now that I can narrow down the conversations I wish to listen to, and there is one in particular that commands attention. It concerns a lesson given by a man named Harriengaels to a student whose name has not yet been mentioned, and seems to be a discourse on the nature of the powers harnessed by the Gaels. At first only one word was familiar, Hev'duil, and I recognise it from conversations I have had with Shalengaels. As I have listened though the strange language has become more understandable, and the discussions between this Master and his Student have grown to take up all of my sleeping hours. From these two men I have learned much.

It remains a fact of the Old World that the Gaels were masters of the powers that could be garnered from the Hev'duil, known within their

brotherhood as the Winds of Life. It was however a mastery that had its costs. The Hev'duil demanded much from those that wielded its power, but over time a balance was reached between the Gaels and the Winds of Life. Much was given and much was expected in return. For the Gaels it meant a life of servitude to the needs of Fate, many lifetimes spent as witnesses to the passing of great events, and in their own way moulding the destinies of others who would achieve great things. In the Old World the Gaels were the Hev'duil's agents of change, men who remained in the shadows whilst forming the destinies of nations. In return the Hev'duil unlocked the powers of the wind and gave the Gaels the foresight to use it.

From the conversations of Harriengael I have learned that there is more than one type of magic in the world. In the lands of the Old World the powers of the wind, focused within the Hev'duil reign supreme, but there are other types of magic that find their powers drawn from elsewhere. Although it is beyond the knowledge of Harriengael to answer, I wonder if the New World also possesses such elemental forces.

For all the interest I have found in the words of Harriengael, I can say that it has not helped me understand the nature of the power growing within me, or answer what it must be used for. It is possible that to find such answers I will need to look closer to home. The Maturi Hedj may have what I need.



*D*ay Two hundred and twenty

In the dark hours before dawn the Fleet awakened to the emergence of a multitude of glimmering lights in the deep. As has been our experience before with these strange points of light, they arose from

somewhere far below and spread out about the ship in a swirling dance that lasted more than an hour. Such was the commotion caused by their appearance that the entire complement of the Dromannion arose from their quarters to view the spectacle. With the decks crowded with both crew and refugees we watched as the spiralling lights rose from beneath us and then scattered across the wide sea.

By the time I had reached the decks I could tell that something important was happening. Previously the lights had congregated in patches, forming a subtle convergence of flickering points that would swirl for a short period before disappearing once again into the depths. From my own experience I can say that they gave no clue to their nature or purpose, but in the total dark of the pre-dawn we were all about to become witness to an amazing choreography of movement and light.

From beneath the Dromannion the lights swarmed upwards, a great rush of emerging colour that quickly spread about the ship before dispersing into the ocean about the entire Fleet. For some time the lights arose from the deep, a rainbow wash of colour that turned in swirls and eddies as it spread outwards. At great speed the lights formed about every ship in the Fleet, creating whirlpools of bright colour in the dark that sent shimmering beams of diffuse light into the sails and shrouds of our vessels.

Against the quiet backdrop of the night sky the display continued, all the vessels of the Fleet remaining enmeshed until the rising moons brought their own light to the world. Upon the eastern horizon the first hint of Elanna sent the lights spiralling once again into the depths. It was strange but as the moon arose against the borders of the world I was sure I saw a line of Behemoths breaching against the borders of our Fleet, too distant to be a danger but in numbers that left me cold. In the sudden light it was only a hint of movement, as thunderclouds illuminated in a momentary flash of lightning before disappearing into the dark. And I was not the only one who saw the vast creatures. A call came quickly from the forward watch, and in response the decks were cleared for action. Ballista-crews ran for their weaponry, and with the rising moons edging the horizon the Dromannion sent off a red warning flare that rose high overhead

before sputtering out against the stars. We waited for the attack to come, but there was no further calls of sightings or danger at hand. The Behemoths had faded away as quietly as the lights, and in the cool night air those of us who could returned to our sleep.

I awoke this morning to find the Dromannion at rest, its relentless course into the north-west stalled. Still weary from the interruption to my sleep I threw on some clothes and made my way quickly onto the middeck. There I found a number of the passengers and some of the crew watching on as the ships of the Kalborean fleet clustered close to our starboard. From the Castaal I saw a small craft making its way quickly towards us. Captain Wilbrims and a few of his officers were in the water, making haste in our direction aboard a lifeboat. Captain Duschet stood upon the starboard gangway, seemingly impatient for the delay but waiting nonetheless for the arrival of his visitors. For those of us who were on deck it was a moment of distraction, watching as the boat struggled against the waves to make its way to our side. It proved to be a short journey made without mishap. When Captain Wilbrims and his number were safely aboard all made for the wheeldeck and then disappeared into the Officer's quarters. Although the Kalboreans looked particularly grim there were no words spoken, and for all of us left upon the weather-decks there was only speculation left in their wakes.

With no answers to the nature of our pause I returned to the duties of my day. After a morning meal I made my way to the surgery, and found Ahlek and the others about to start our morning rounds. All conversation quickly turned to the lights of the early morning and for some time we rumoured on what they were, and what their purpose might be. It is a truth to say that none of us had seen anything like it before, and as such our theories were nothing beyond speculation.

It was Faren who brought the first hard news on the nature of the sea-lights, and he came directly from the meeting with the Kalboreans to impart what he had learned. It is a story that has amazed us all. Although we had been situated at the centre of the Fleet, and in our own position well placed to see the wondrous display, it was the Kalborean ships that had witnessed the purpose of the swirling eddies of light. In the early hours the first signs of the lights appeared in the north, just beyond the boundaries of the

Kalborean Fleet. Of their number none had seen the lights before, and as a precaution the Captain called his vessels closer. Without the benefit of the moons to light their way the sea was a black reflection of the sky above, one that only enhanced the brilliant points of light that quickly rushed from the depths below. As we had seen the lights surrounded all of the Kalborean vessels, bathing everything in a shimmering veil of colour. But it was to the north, beyond the sight of ourselves that a great battle had begun, and it was between the lights and an old nemesis that had not yet finished with our Fleet.

From the north at least a dozen Behemoths had gathered in the dark, their vast forms surging towards the Fleet. Against such a number there would have been little chance that any of our ships could have survived, but in this assault it was not ourselves who put up the defence. It was the lights that moved to intercept the charging monsters, and in the deep waters a hard-fought battle began that saw the Behemoths attempting to charge the Fleet, but being turned back by some force that they could not overwhelm. As Captain Wilbrims described it, the lights formed a barrier beyond which the Behemoths could not pass, no matter how they tried to breach their way through it. In that short hour the lights kept the vast beasts at bay and then turned them back into the ocean to the north. It was a battle that had saved all our lives.

When Faren had finished we all looked at each other, wondering at the Providence that had delivered such an ally to our cause, but this was not all that the Healer had to tell. It was true that the Kalboreans had not seen the lights on their voyage out of the east, but it was not true that they did not know what they were. For the peoples of Cembria and Haldar, of whom most of the Kalboreans are numbered, there is a legend of a people known as the Ambergene. It is said that in a time long before the Age of Reason that Cembria fostered a treaty between themselves and a race of beings that lived in isolation beneath the wash of the Grey Sea. Such beings were known as Pathfinders, or Ambergene, and it was through them that the Cembrians found safe passage as they plied their trade routes up and down the coasts of the Northern Realms. In return the Cembrians supplied materials needed by the Ambergene and for many years the treaty remained in force, and to the benefit of both.

It is said that the Ambergene never let their true form be known. All that was ever seen was the flickering lights of their number guiding ships through dangerous waters, and fending the unwary from the ravages of those creatures of the deep that might wish them harm. It is said also that for reasons unknown the Ambergene disappeared, leaving the Cembrians to find their way alone, and in doing so passed from the knowledge of Men. For Captain Wilbrims the lights could mean nothing else. We had been saved by the Pathfinders.

The last piece of Faren's tale was the most intriguing however. As far as the knowledge of the Cembrians could ascertain the treaty between themselves and the Ambergene had never been broken. It is Captain Wilbrims' contention that as the Ambergene had saved us from the Behemoths, that we should reciprocate with a payment in kind. The nature of the payment that he has proposed has left much dispute amongst the Captains and to my mind does seems very extreme, but has been agreed to nonetheless. With nothing else to give the Kalboreans have resolved to sink one of their ships, consigning it to the deep so that it may be gathered up by the Ambergene. The sinking is to be done tonight.

With this plan decided the remainder of the day has been one of organisation and additional duties. The ship that is to be scuttled is a coal Barque by the name of the Hallenbrook, a two masted vessel that has been home to more than one hundred and twenty-five souls. Most of her number have been moved to other ships in the Kalborean fleet, however a request from thirty Dwarvendim that were also billeted aboard has seen a small increase in our own number.

The Dwarvendim have been transferred to the Dromannion, and our day has been spent finding new accommodations for them, and the stowage of a large amount of supplies and provender that filled the Hallenbrook's holds. The process of unloading the Hallenbrook and distributing its goods through the remainder of the Fleet has been time consuming, the job only complete in the hour after sunset. It is easy to see in the faces of those involved in the transfer that most are not convinced that the Kalboreans are doing anything other than wasting a good ship. Captain Wilbrims has remained firm in his belief that such an offering will be well received, and that we may yet gain far more from the Ambergene as we journey westwards if it is done.

According to tradition the sinking of the Hallenbrook is to be done at midnight. The day has passed quickly and I have forgotten to keep my appointment with the Maturi Hedj. After the sinking of the Hallenbrook I will search him out and find out what he wants.

Day Two hundred and twenty-one

At midnight of the night past the Hallenbrook has been sunk, and in its demise the firm beliefs of the Kalboreans have been proven correct. It was fortunate for us all that the weather remained favourable as the final preparations were made. Although I had never really thought on it, the sinking of a ship so that it will remain in one piece is not as easy as one might suppose. To carefully scuttle a ship without explosion or act of violence requires consideration to the design of the vessel, and the different way that water might be introduced to flood its many cavities. A ship after all is designed to float, not to submerge easily.

To this end both Captain Duschet and Captain Wilbrims have worked together to determine how it might be done. The traditions of the Cembrians dictate that an offering to the Ambergdene must be whole, and in good working order. If the Hallenbrook was to be offered as payment for our deliverance from the Behemoths then it must go down easily, and without harm. Such a way was found.

Whilst the Fleet organised the distribution of the Hallenbrook's cargo, the crew of that ship started to remove all the inner doors, hatchways and covers from within the interior of the ship. Where bulkheads would have halted the flooding of any part of the vessel, large ports were cut carefully into their solid wood to allow for an easy flow of water. By the hour before midnight the ship was ready, all that was required was a way to flood the ship and send it to the bottom. I can say that I had not enquired as to how the ship was to be flooded, but the answer came as a small lifeboat rowed out from the side of the Castaal, and from its number two men disappeared below decks. The ship had been abandoned, and except for the two men aboard all the Fleet waited for what would happen next.

For some minutes we waited, the Fleet at anchor watching for some sign of movement aboard the ship. In the light winds, the Hallenbrook

swayed quietly upon the swell, and then a drumbeat began, one that vibrated through the Dromannion as its beats began to build in strength. Quickly the frequency of the beats grew, and I could feel the vibrations resonating through the wood of the ship as I held firm to the starboard balustrade.

Before us the Hallenbrook remained afloat, but as the drumming grew in strength I could see the curved hull of the ship begin to list slightly to port. At that moment the drumming stopped. I would learn later that the two men aboard the Hallenbrook were responsible for the reverberations, and that they had opened two small valves in the bowels of the ship that would normally have only been opened if the vessel was in dry dock. It was not enough to sink the ship alone, but it was the beginning of a process that would see the steerage decks of the ship flooded, and lower the ship to port sufficiently to expose the upper decks to the open sea.

In the dark the two men appeared again on deck and quickly returned to their lifeboat. As the sailors frantically rowed their small craft away the ship listed further to port, and then began to settle deeper in the water. From within the Hallenbrook there came a rushing sound of air being expelled under pressure, and very quickly there rose above it the unmistakable gurgle of water being sucked into the open spaces below decks. We all watched as the ship sank into its watery grave, but we were not the only ones.

As the ship's hull slowly settled into the sea the drumming began again. This time however, it was not the hands of men who beat out the rhythm. In the dark waters a single light appeared in the sea below the slowly sinking ship, and then as we watched others began to emerge from the depths. In a flurry of speeding light they all disappeared, only to appear a short time later in a vast multitude that welled up out of the black water, and grew into a swirling mass of colour that completely surrounded the Hallenbrook. The Ambergene were taking their gift.

With the same energy that saw them hold back the Behemoths, the lights took hold of the Hallenbrook. Quickly it sank into the waves, and as its topmast finally disappeared beneath the sea, it was still visible as a silhouette against a cloud of roiling light that carried it off

to the north-east. For whatever purpose, the Ambergdene had excepted our offering and had taken it away with them.

When the Hallenbrook finally disappeared from sight, we were left once again to think on what we had seen in the darkness. The Kalboreans had been right, the offering had been taken and now the treaty between ourselves and the Ambergdene had been reaffirmed. As I made my way slowly back to my quarters I could only imagine what that might mean for our future.

The suns of morning have risen to find a change in the weather, and a stiff wind blowing out of the south. This day sees us one ship the less, and with the prospect of an ally on our journey into the north-west. With the wind hard upon our port the Fleet now forges ahead, the pause of the previous day now only a memory as we return to the duties of our routine. For myself this day must begin with the keeping of my appointment with the Maturi Hedj.

I found the Shadar Len just after the morning meal, and gave my apologies for missing the appointment with his master on the previous day. Agrindel seemed much distracted himself as we spoke, but agreed that the meeting should be held without delay. I followed the Dwarvendim out of the middecks and up into the Maturi's quarters upon the wheeldeck. As we walked I asked him on his thoughts about the offering of the Hallenbrook to the Ambergdene. I must say that he was evasive in his response. Why the ship was sacrificed, he said, was a matter for the Kalborean fleet. After a pause he added that the sight of the ship disappearing beneath the waves, and the thought of the Behemoths in the distance had brought back memories for the Dwarvendim that none of them wished to discuss. I took his point and returned to a quiet reflection of the sea on our walk to the Maturi's quarters.

The Maturi Hedj was waiting at his doorway as the Shadar Len and myself made for his rooms. I apologised again for my tardiness but the Maturi did not seem concerned. Instead he ushered us both inside and then spent a small amount of time ensuring the doors to his quarters were securely locked. The Maturi is not a man who spends time in idle conservation, and after a short enquiry as to my health he began looking through a pile of papers that lay fastened together by

string upon his desk. The Shadar Len motioned for me to sit, so as the Dwarvendim worked away at his papers I found a chair and waited.

I can say that it is easy to spot the quarters of a studious mind. Both the Healer Faren and the Maturi Hedj hold a number of behaviours in common. The most noticeable being an ability to accumulate huge amounts of scrolls and documents, and then keep them in such a level of disarray that the finding of any particular item falls either to providence or luck. It seems that an organised and intellectual mind can function quite adequately in chaos, and certainly the Maturi's rooms fit the description.

As I waited the Maturi delved into his writings and finally emerged with a small blue envelope. I had expected that I might be assailed with questions left unanswered by the disappearance of Shalengael. Instead the Maturi handed me the small envelope but motioned for me not to open it just yet.

It was, he explained, part of a series of letters left by the northerner upon his leaving the Fleet. Most of the other letters were directions as to what to do whilst within the port of Auren'dael, but this letter was addressed to me specifically, with the intention that it should not be given until the Fleet was well beyond the Midreach. Apart from these facts the Maturi could say no more, he requested only that once I had read it that we might talk on what it said. I could see no reason to delay so I opened it up and read the short passage that was scrawled upon its light blue paper.

I have to admit that I expected more from the message than what it contained. For a moment I sat back and considered what it might mean before handing it to the Maturi. It was written in the common language of the Haarn, one that I had not previously known, but which has become very familiar to me over the course of the past weeks. It was the language of Harriengael.

The Maturi took the paper from me and read it aloud. "Listen to the voices, they will tell you what to do." The look on the man's face as he reread the message to himself said everything about what it meant. It was not hard to realise that my growing power could no longer remain a secret, at least not to the two Dwarvendim who now looked at me with broad smiles and a thousand questions.

The remainder of my day was spent in the company of the Maturi and his Shadar. There was no point in keeping secrets any longer and instead we became conspirators in a larger game. I explained everything of the growing power within me, and gave account of the lessons and knowledge that come to me in the night hours. To all this the Maturi listened and then gave counsel. It was his opinion that it is best that the existence of my power not be made known just yet. There are still many amongst our number who distrust the magic of the Gaels, not the least being the peoples of the Kalborean Fleet. It is a fact of their history that they hunted down and destroyed the Gaels. The existence of their power still remaining in the world may not be accepted well.

On the matter of the voices, and the lessons of Harriengael, the Maturi offered only a small direction. Look, he said, for anything that might tell me how to use the power given by Shalengael. It has been offered as a resource to help us in a moment of need that will more than likely come upon us unexpectedly. I have the uncomfortable feeling that it will be left to me to overcome it.

My meeting with the Maturi concluded with a pact of secrecy. They would keep everything that had been said to themselves, and counselled that at least for the moment I should not tell anyone else. It would seem also that I am to be watched diligently by my own personal bodyguard. They will apparently remain at a discreet distance, but will be watching for any circumstances that might warrant help. On this matter I had no say. I am not sure that I will enjoy such close scrutiny.

I left the quarters of the Maturi at dusk and made my way to the Healer Faren's rooms. The earnest nature of my meeting with the Dwarvendim had left me with a need to give apologies for not attending surgery hours, and to provide explanation for my absence. The Healer however, was aware that I had been taken for a meeting, and wished only to know if it had been fruitful. I could only say that I was little the wiser for it, and gave notice that it might not be the last. To that Faren shrugged his shoulders and said that if that was to be the case then he had better make good use of me whilst he could. Before I could say anything more I was shepherded into the Surgery to find a number of Shurdu players waiting in a forlorn state for attention. My day was not yet over.

*D*ay Two hundred and twenty-two

Today has greeted us with a change in wind direction and a quicker passage into the west. Overnight the wind veered to the east, and with the strong bluster at our backs we have picked up speed and now race across the face of the wind into the north-west. The day is overcast though, the morning skies quickly covered with a thickening blanket of cloud that scuds before us as it pushes westwards. Upon the ocean the Dromannion cuts deep into the swell, its bow finding clean water as it rises and falls against the waves. I can record here that there is a strong feeling of optimism in the air as well. Everyone aboard can sense that there is something important ahead, and we all hope that it will finally be the New World. First though, we must find the Sentinels of the Ashgard. I can say that in this regard it is the Ambergene who are showing the way.

As has been our practice since the beginning of our flight from the east, there has always been at least three scoutships in the vanguard of the Fleet. For most of our voyage they have been the Equinox, the Allahard and the Arboron. With the joining of the Kalboreans there has been a further two ships, the Janielle and the Graemor, that have been at the forefront of our voyage. For most of the journey so far these ships have been nothing but sails at the horizon, keeping a constant vigil for danger ahead, or shallow waters. Since our reintroduction to the Ambergene these ships have had need to change their duty. Now they follow the Ambergene as the mysterious creatures guide them through the waters. I have heard that a single band of light now travels ahead of the scoutships, providing a safe course for the Fleet as we progressively move into the north-west. In truth I do not know how the Ambergene know where our destination lies, but the Kalboreans are adamant that the Pathfinders will not let us down.

Since the sinking of the Hallenbrook we have seen nothing of the Ambergene from the decks of the Dromannion, however the effects of their presence has been felt through the whole of the Fleet. At all points of the compass there have been continuous sightings of Behemoths, their massive bodies continuing to breach against an

invisible wall of protection that has been spread around us. It is both reassuring, and somewhat disconcerting as well, to see the huge beasts attempting to break the unseen cordon that has been thrown around us. In total seven of the monsters have been identified, and it would seem that but for the protection afforded to us by our new allies we would have met a certain doom at their hands. I cannot say why the Behemoths have remained so solid in their intent to do us harm, and regardless of the effectiveness of the Amberdenes' ability to hold them back the Captain has kept all the weapons of the Dromannion at the ready, just in case.

In the afternoon I was called to a meeting with Faren and have been informed that I am to have a change of duties. Somehow the fact that I can now understand the common tongue of the Haarn has reached the ears of the Healer, and as he is not one to let a resource go to waste has given me full responsibility for the care of the NomDruse. Although this would not be my choice of an assignment, I must go as I am directed and so from the morrow I will be in charge of their care. It would seem that they have remained firm in their wish to stay within their Cresh, and I have been given the task of easing them back into the wider world. I cannot say that I have any idea how this might be done, but I will attempt it nonetheless.



Day Two hundred and twenty-three

This Two hundred and twenty-third day of our journey has passed into sunset, and with the fall of the twin suns into the west I find myself once again looking for solitude upon the foredeck. My first day as Guardian of the NomDruse has passed also and I must record in truth that I am glad that it has ended. The children are a handful, their needs constant and the problems of having so many to tend grow with each passing hour. I am sure that I will make sense of it all but my hopes are thin. I am exhausted and tomorrow looms as surely as the suns will rise.

I have found some intriguing questions though, about the children themselves and why Shalengael spent so many hours with them. There is no doubt that they are very intelligent, and surprisingly they seem to have absolutely no knowledge that Shalengael held any power other than the ability to speak with them in their own tongue. To them he was a protective figure who ensured their isolation and allowed them to remain unseen below decks. I have not yet fathomed why this is so important to them, but I have resolved myself to finding out why.

It is fortunate that there are many hands to help with the tending of the children's needs. I find myself more of an organiser and this has allowed me to spend some time talking with the children. One in particular has caught my interest. The oldest girl has proven to be the de facto leader of the extended group and it is with her that I have found out most about the children, and their lives before the coming of the Enemy to the Haarn. Her name is Eylish and she stands out from the others as a natural leader, but she holds the same reticence to talk openly. It is almost as if the entire group holds a secret close and cannot afford to let it slip. It is most vexing.

Day Two hundred and twenty-four

This morning has brightened to find the Fleet at a standstill. Two ships have run aground and the rest of our number have been forced to furl sail as we consider what should be done. Soundings taken over the past days have shown the waters to be deep and the sudden grounding has proven a mystery worth the unravelling. The Amberdene are not to be found anywhere and I have been told that the vessels strayed north of the Fleet overnight, running at considerable speed onto the obstruction. It would seem that we have been lucky that none of the larger ships hit what lies just beneath the waves.

The ships, the Kalthalas and the Callenfrey, are struck fast upon a wide plateau of rock that sits submerged only a few metres beneath the ocean's surface. Needless to say the Captains of these vessels have been charged with a quick resolution of their problem, however the ships are stuck fast, and it will take more than just the resources of their crews to get them off.

I have found out from our Second Officer that the ships themselves are still sound, but they are held fast upon the wide shelf of rock mostly by their own weight, and the hands of wind and tide that both work to push them further aground. It is in his mind that the Captain is to order the lowering of lifeboats and try to haul the ships off the stone. It is a job that will need to be done quickly.

A huge storm now grows in the east. We have been fortunate in the past days that the weather has remained favourable, and have taken advantage of the strengthening wind to make great distance on our voyage. Now however, a line of dark cloud grows against the horizon, and with the prevailing wind will reach us before the end of the day. As the Callenfrey and the Kalthalas now stand they can withstand the light swell that runs past our Fleet without further damage. A full-blown storm will tear them to pieces.

With the storm approaching the Captains of the Fleet moved to quick action. There was no time to empty the ships so that they might be lighter for the towing, instead a large number of lifeboats were lowered from each of the surrounding ships and ordered in lines that ran from the grounded vessels. Long hawsers were extended from both of the ships, and with all available hands to the task the process of removing the Callenfrey and the Kalthalas from their encumbrances began. Each are Kalborean vessels, and although lighter in design than the ships of Adoracia they are not small by any means. Twin-masted and displacing at least three hundred tonnes each I was at a loss to see how any number of lifeboats might have the power to pull them away from the rock-shelf. But in these matters I have little knowledge. I am not a man of the sea and it did indeed prove to be possible, if not laborious.

Each of the ships was joined by ropes to ten lifeboats, and each boat was manned by twelve crew that pulled at their oars, desperately attempting to haul the ships into deeper water. At first I could see no ground being made but each Officer aboard the lifeboats was working to a rhythm that allowed the maximum pull of their oars to coincide with the surge of the waves across the rock shelf. Slowly, inch by inch, the vessels came away from the shelf and by mid-afternoon both were once again in deep water.

With the ships now out of danger we have turned again to our voyage. At our backs the storm approaches, and as I write this entry to my journal I can see the arcing flashes of lightning buried deep in the clouds as they race towards us. The storm is going to be a powerful tempest, one that will not pass lightly. There is more of this day that I would like to record but the encroaching weather will not allow it. If I get the opportunity I will write more tomorrow.



Day Two hundred and twenty-six

Two days have passed and the storm continues unabated, a driving relentless tempest of gale-force winds and drenching rain that has assailed our Fleet and left us dispersed upon the heaving sea. It has been a time of great trial for all of us, but we have weathered such storms before, and in the blustering winds have been pushed far to the west. I have spent my time below decks, mostly attending to the inevitable injuries and maladies brought about by such weather, but as I am Guardian to the NomDruse I have also been required to ensure their needs are met. It has been during this time that I have noticed something further about the children, and it leaves me wondering further why they remain behind closed doors.

It has been my experience that no matter how many times the Fleet has been assailed by storms on our voyage, the unease and the fear generated by their power has not abated. It can be seen in the eyes of those below decks that each storm brings with it a renewed sense of how small we are on this vast ocean, and how powerful the forces are that are arrayed against us. Such fears I have not seen in the NomDruse. With the time to remain with them as the storm rages outside I see nothing of the anxiety that can be found throughout the ship. The children go about their normal routine oblivious to the sounds of the weather, and seem indifferent to each pounding resonance of wind and wave as they strike the Dromannion. Within their Cresh they appear completely at ease. It is a strange thing.

Although the children appear at ease with their circumstances I cannot say the same thing for myself. The power of Shalengael continues to grow and in times such as this it strengthens markedly. It is as if the storm magnifies the ability of the power to find new energy, and within the dark hours the voices have overtaken all attempts I have made for sleep. I find myself now laying in my hammock, taking in the words of Harriengael and searching his lessons for some clue on how I must use the northerner's power. So far it has eluded me.

Day Two hundred and twenty-eight

The storm has eased and now the Fleet runs before a strong wind that blows unceasingly from the east. In the constant gales the Dromannion forges into the waves, its bow digging deep into the swell as we race towards our goal. At all sides the ships of our number surge forward, the wind pushing us further into the unknown waters of this western ocean. Ahead there is nothing but the sharp line of the horizon and the promise of a salvation that is yet to be realised. Somewhere out beyond that horizon stands the Sentinels of the Ashgard, and we all wait in anticipation to discover what they are, and how they will ensure our passage to the New World. There is something out there, of this I am sure. In my dreaming hours I listen to Harriengael and find the vision of vast stone pillars returning to my thoughts. Again these towers of stone have entered my dreams and I have no doubt that they are connected in some way to what is ahead.

On this Two hundred and twenty-eighth day of our journey I can report that the NomDruse remain stoic in their reluctance to leave their Cresh, and that a single Kreele has begun to follow the Fleet. It was noticed in the early hours of the morning and has maintained a station some distance behind the trailing vessels of our number. There seems to be no malevolent intent, the creature happy to ride the winds in the east and do little but call out every so often. For the Captain though, it has proven enough of a threat that he has kept two of the ballistas manned at all times.



*D*ay Two hundred and forty-six

Eighteen days have passed since my last entry and the winds have not yet abated. We have encountered no new obstacles to our progress westwards, and I am grateful to report that there have been no new sightings of the Behemoths either. My duties remain as they have been. The NomDruse children provide me with little time for rest and although I will not yet confess it to Faren, I have given up on any further attempt at trying to coax them from their quarters.

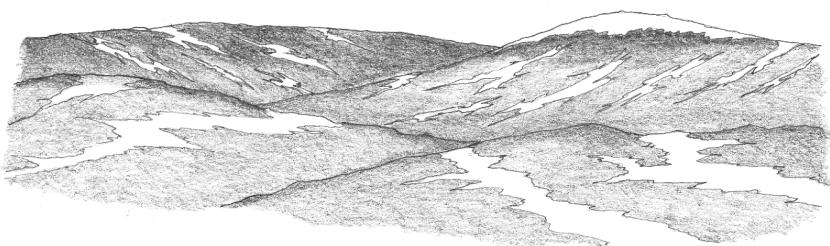
These past weeks have shown me that it is not that the children do not wish to leave their Cresh, it is that they cannot. Something is holding them within, and the closer we move to the Sentinels the greater a hold it takes upon them. I have seen with my own eyes how relaxed and at ease the children are within their quarters, yet there is now no inclination shown by any of them to leave. It is as if the very idea of going above decks has been swept from their memory, and replaced with an overriding need to remain below. Of all the things I have seen on this voyage it is indeed the strangest.

We are travelling in strange waters these days. I do not know if there are others aboard who feel the same as myself, but there is something on the winds now that reeks of change. The gales have blown us at speed towards the western horizon and we have covered more than twelve hundred leagues since my last entry. The winds carry us onwards, and with each league that passes beneath our bow I can feel something immense moving towards us. I cannot help but believe that it is the Sentinels, and the feeling grows that they are some type of barrier, a divider between the Old World and the New. The words of Harriengael are becoming clearer in my mind, and all the knowledge of his teachings tells me that we are nearing the outer borders of the influence of the Hev'duil. I can only hope that we do not find the edge of the world when we reach it.

*D*ay Two hundred and forty-seven

The morning has come to find the sky crowded with Kreel. The single beast that had been following our ships has now been joined by

dozens of the huge lizard-creatures, and in their multitude they circle the Fleet like carrion-birds surveying a carcass. All the weapons that we have at our disposal have been manned and readied for any attack but as of yet they have only maintained a position outside the range of our ballistas. Neither the Maturi nor the Captain can guess at their purpose and we can do nothing except remain vigilant.



Day Two hundred and forty-eight

This day has passed with no diminishing of the wind. It is the general belief of the Officers of this ship that we have entered an airstream powered not by weather systems or climate, but by an unknown force that wishes to propel us with all speed to the Sentinels. The Ambergdene have now disappeared from view completely. The scoutships report no sightings of their lights for the past six days and since we have become caught within these winds have seen them only infrequently. It would seem that we have been blown beyond their domain, and beyond the reach of their protection. We are once again alone in the deep ocean.

I must report that the numbers of the Krel have increased considerably. Many now circle the Fleet but many more have flown off into the west, beyond the horizon and far from our sight. There is a purpose and a direction to their actions which leaves us all in fear of their intentions. With so many of the creatures now about us I cannot help but wonder if the dreams of the Krel and the deadly pillars of rising stone were indeed prophecies of our doom. Logic and reason seem to have fled as we speed westwards and rumours infest the Dromannion of what we might find in the New World.

*D*ay Two hundred and forty-nine

This morning has seen the wind weaken, and with its lessening the Kreele have begun to move in closer. Some shots have been fired, much to the protestation of the Maturi, but it could not be helped. The creatures seem intent on testing the range of our defences, and having drawn fire from a number of vessels have kept station just outside the reach of our ballistas. With many eyes focused on the Kreele there has been little activity aboard except for the routine of the crew as they keep the Dromannion on its course. We have seen nothing of the Amberdene except for a single sighting of a light in the north just after midnight. The Behemoths are gone as well and I wonder if we have had no further sign of the Pathfinders because there is nothing further they can do to protect the Fleet. It is in my mind that we are going to have to deal with the Kreele ourselves.

*D*ay Two hundred and fifty

The Kreele continue to gather in a large flock beyond the range of our defences in the east. More of the creatures have flown into the west ahead of us, and there is a general belief growing that an attack is imminent. Why these monsters should find the need to assault us now, when we have been overlooked by them for most of our voyage, is a mystery that will probably remain unanswered. In this matter we can only maintain our vigilance and hope that their flight is simply a coincidence that will see them depart without harm.

I can note that our blacksmith has been hard at work on a new weapon. The appearance of the Kreele has given impetus to a new type of ballista bolt that I have seen fitted to a number of the Dromannion's weapons. What it does is unknown to me. It is my hope that we will never need to find out.

The Kreele are magnificent creatures though, and on this I have found some agreement amongst my fellow crewmen. For all the malevolence of their nature they are beasts of the air after all, and will no doubt act according to the imperatives of their instinct. I would hate to see any of them destroyed if we must defend ourselves,

but we too must act according to our own instincts, and I am sure I will not hesitate to kill one if it proves necessary.

I have had some time to spend watching the huge lizards wheeling their way at our stern and it has become clear that they truly have mastered the art of flight. On wide leathery wings the Kreele glide upon the upper winds, turning in wide circles as they keep their position at our backs. One of the Kreele is most interesting. Larger than the rest it remains separate from the flock, and does seem to dislike the company of its brethren. Unlike the others, which are in general coloured in a drab grey-green mottling, this creature has wide flashes of white and blue along its neck and wings. As it rides the air currents I have formed the impression that it is following us for reasons quite different from the rest. It seems to be watching the Dromannion in particular.

Although the Kreele have been the focus of our attention I must record an important event in my attempts to master the powers of Shalengael. In the evening of the night past I was on the foredeck, seeking a few moments of quiet before making my way back to my quarters. As has become the usual circumstance I could feel at my back the gaze of four pairs of eyes diligently guarding my position. I must admit my Dwarvendim guards are good at what they do. For most of the day I am unaware of their presence, and in the jostle of a normal day they remain discreet but attentive.

The shadows of the night had found me alone upon the foredeck, and in the gloom I settled upon the forecastle decking and watched the rise and fall of the ocean as the Dromannion ran before a light breeze. Overhead Elanna and Shabel shined down through an overcast of high cloud and scudding cumulus that moved quickly in front of the moons, leaving them surrounded by a halo of silver light. With this vista before me the words of Harriengael came into my thoughts and his words startled me. It was the first time that I had heard the voices in a time of wakefulness and to my further surprise the man was addressing me directly.

Into my mind came a flood of knowledge, of strange words and arcane rituals that seemed ancient and ambiguous. One part however, gave me pause to raise my hand and concentrate of the air just in front of my fingertips. In my mind there came a vision of a

small spinning vortex of light, and immediately the same spiralling glow appeared before me. It was a revelation that provided the key to unleashing the power of the Gaels and I tested it immediately.

Before me the ocean ran as a dark waterscape of rising water and reflective whitecaps that sparkled silver under the light of the moons. In my mind I visualised a wide wave of air moving across the surface of the high cloud overhead, and sure enough the wispy overcast moved as smoke might if disturbed by a waving hand. It was a clumsy attempt but it had my pulse racing. In a moment of thoughtlessness I waved my hand across the face of the moons and found the cloud parting in a wide swathe that immediately brought a gasp of astonishment from one of the Dwarvendim guards. Carefully I withdrew the power I had raised and returned to my quarters. I have no doubt that what the guards witnessed will be communicated quickly to the Maturi.

Day Two hundred and fifty-one

It is said in the lands of Cembria that dreams should never be ignored, to disregard their hidden truths a folly that all men ultimately pay a price for. It can also be said that men of reason such as ourselves have learned much on our voyage, and we were in no danger of ignoring our dreams. It has come to pass on this day that we have found our worst nightmares in the waking world, and have fought a battle the better prepared for having taken notice.

In the hour after midnight of the night past, a warning flare rose high into the sky over our scoutships. It was an orange spark of colour that arched out to the north and quickly brought a response from our Captain. Our forward ballistas fired four flares into the night, their trails spluttering against the wind before exploding high above the leading ships. The sight that greeted us left all on deck wondering if we had just stepped into our worst fears.

Within the bright spheres of light we could see clearly ahead the six scoutships drawing close together. The lead vessel, the Janielle, was abutted against a huge pillar of dark stone, and even as we watched it burst into flames.

Above the rush of a strong wind those of us who had been roused from sleep could hear the distinct, terrifying sound of splintering wood, and of the cries of men as they fought the flames. But this was only a foretaste of the scene that opened before us. In the light of the descending flares, and the growing conflagration of the Janielle, it became clear that there lay before us a wide barrier of pillars and jagged outcrops of stone, thrusting from the waters like daggers and bludgeons.

The Janielle was sinking and as the orders were given to abandon ship the other scouts crowded in to pick up the survivors. It was then that a greater trap was unleashed. From out of the scudding cloud above there came a long screech that echoed out into the pillars ahead, which was then answered by a torrent of urgent responses. Out of the darkness there arose hundreds of Kreel, and as one they descended upon the Fleet.

I can say that in that instant of realisation everything became clear to me. The reasons why the creatures had been gathering, and the constant vigil of their number at our rear, had been for the sole purpose of our demise. But as I watched I sensed there was something else on the wind, a driving malevolence that we had hoped had been left behind in the rubble of Corin'kraag. Even as I gripped the handle of my axe I could feel the hatred of an all-controlling energy reaching across the great distances of the Grey Sea to bring destruction upon us. It was not the Kreel that were attacking us, it was the Enemy.

At that moment of impending catastrophe there was no order given, no word of command uttered. The Captain stood upon the wheeldeck aghast as the multitude of huge creatures erupted from the pillars and raced for the many ships that had come to a halt before the impassable barrier. It was a delay that could only last a moment. From the Captain there came the command for all hands to be armed, and then the order to fire. Instantly the forward ballistas opened up with their new bolts, and in the darkness I saw the sky itself erupt in flame. In long silent arcs the bolts flew out into the midst of the advancing Kreel before detonating in a ball of explosive debris. Even from the deck of the Dromannion I could hear the whistling flight of hundreds of small pieces of shrapnel as they cut through the air, and then tore into the bodies of the reptiles.

At our right and left the Avernell and the Castaal also unleashed this new weapon, and they were quickly followed by all the other ships within the Fleet that were so armed. The detonation of this onslaught of bolts cut the air into a haze of flying metal and falling bodies. In the light of the battle I could see the Kreele falling from the sky, torn to pieces and dead, or spiralling down upon broken wings to hit the sea and drown. As I watched I followed the arcing bolts as they left their ships and the deafening blasts as the projectiles exploded in the air before us. But it was not enough to stop the Kreele.

From within the clouds of flying metal many of the creatures persisted in their onslaught upon the ships, angling down in steep descents as they strove to reach their targets. In desperation the ballista crews reloaded with normal bolts and began picking off the Kreele one by one, sickening explosions tearing the beasts to pieces as they disappeared within erupting balls of flame. But still they came, their numbers too great to withstand with the ballistas alone. Quickly the Captain realised he would have to defend his ship in close combat.

The first of the Kreele landed upon the Dromannion and immediately became tangled in the shroud-lines between the foremast and the midmast. Without a secure footing it thrashed viciously against its restraints and succeeded only in tearing down the rigging and falling onto the middeck, its thrashing form netted within a morass of rope and sail. The Dwarvendim finished the beast off with axes and then found themselves immediately under attack by another of the creatures that landed clumsily upon the foredeck.

In truth I believed at this time that we had met our doom. After all the travail of our passage it was now that we were to meet an adversary that could not be overcome. How wrong I was. From all corners of the ship every man and women who could wield axe or cudgel descended upon the Kreele and hammered it into oblivion. Men were lost in that struggle but no time was given by our enemy to rejoice at this small victory. Even as we pushed the second Kreele's body over the side two more of the beasts landed upon our topmasts and began tearing at the sails. The crowsnest was thrown down, and with it came four men who were smashed upon the middeck. With shrouds and ratlines collapsing in heaps around us, the forward ballista crews loaded solid bolts and shot the creatures off the mastheads.

Immediately more of the Kreel made for the ship, and as we waited those few moments for their next attack I was able to look out over the Fleet and witness a scene of devastation. Almost every ship was under assault, the winged reptiles intent on tearing away our ability to continue. The Avernell continued to fire its ballistas, long arcs of sputtering fire exploding against beasts in the air, and everywhere there was fire, obscuring the battle within veils of smoke and darkness.

For the remainder of the night so did the battle continue, the Kreel assaulting both ship and crew, dealing out death and destruction but always we beat them off. It was only with the rising of the suns that the creatures relented and rose up to disappear into the east. What has been left behind is carnage.

The light of the morning sky has greeted us and we have survived, but the cost has been great. At all sides the Fleet closes upon the Dromannion and the damage caused by the Kreel is evident to all. There is not a ship that has not suffered damage, and six wallow in the swell, their passengers and crew abandoning them to the depths. I cannot say yet how many of our number have been lost, but only three of the scoutships have returned, the fate of the others is unknown to me.

Day Two hundred and fifty-two

A day has passed since we have beaten off the Kreel and thankfully they have not returned. There has been no sign of their number and for this we are most grateful. The Fleet cannot continue on until repairs are made, and our losses have been such that it will be many days yet before we will be able to return to our voyage. It is not going to be an easy task.

Ahead of us stand the pillars, their enormous forms thrusting from the water in a wide barrier to the north and south of where we now lay at anchor. The Fleet is gathered close and all ships that are armed have formed a loose defensive ring about us. Providence has granted us a fine day without wind and in the calm we have begun to determine what we must now do.

It is hard to look upon the remains of our Fleet and not despair at the damage wrought by the Krel. Nine ships have been lost, more than half the Fleet dismasted or damaged in some way. The sea remains a wreckage of broken wood, torn sails, and the carcasses of an unknown number of dead Krel. Their bodies float amongst the hulls of our ships as an undeniable reminder of what we have endured, and it is to the numbering of our dead that we have spent the greater part of this day. Some four hundred of our number have perished and it is impossible to ascertain yet the full measure of those who are injured. We are in desperate straits, our ships broken, our resolve crumbling as the enormity of our losses are uncovered. If the Krel attack again we will be finished.

*D*ay Two hundred and fifty-three

Against the backdrop of the pillars we have begun to reconstitute our Fleet. Ten ships have been deemed unseaworthy and are to become the raw materials needed to repair the rest. Whether we can remain here has been a matter of some dispute. Providence has favoured us in that the winds have remained light and we have been able to remain at a distance from the pillars. What we have found within the jutting outcrops of stone has given pause to us all, and it has been decided that the Fleet will move further to the north to effect repairs.

With the return of the Equinox has come stories of a ships' graveyard within the pillars. Beyond the remains of the Janielle, the Arboron and the Graemor there can be seen the splintered shells of dozens of vessels, all smoothed and weathered by long years of exposure. Captain Rendell has said that most are unrecognisable, being of ancient and unknown design, and it can only be assumed that there have been many explorers that have fallen victim to these stony teeth. How it is that they are not mentioned by Caren'thal the Younger can only mean that he missed them on his journey and therefore there must be a way around them. The Equinox has been sent this afternoon to find that way.



*D*ay Two hundred and fifty-eight

Repairs to the Fleet continue, and we have seen nothing further of the Krel. In an attempt to move as far as possible from the pillars we have slowly made our way northwards, taking those ships that cannot sail under tow, and now we wait for the return of the Equinox as we work upon the ships. The Dromannion remains heavily damaged, having lost its main masthead and a third of its sail and rigging. I have been told that repairs can be made but that they will take at least a week to affect. It is a delay that constrains most of the other damaged ships and for the moment there is little we can do but work the repairs and continue cannibalising rope, sail and timbers from those ships that are to be left behind.

The loss of so many vessels has seen a major shift in the numbers aboard the remaining ships. Gone are the quarters given with the leaving of the Midreach. All the Healer's Assistants must now find comfort in a single room below the foredeck. Gone is Faren's library as well, its contents packed and stored away for safekeeping. Even the NomDruse have been required to give up a part of their Cresh as space has been acquired for the accommodation of a further one hundred and fifty souls aboard. And there is no time for relaxation. I have found myself fully employed in the treatment of the injured, and all available hands have been laid to the task of making the ship seaworthy once again. In these endeavours time is against us. We cannot afford another storm whilst under repair and our food cannot last forever. By all accounts there is more than a month's food in storage but we do not yet know how much farther we must travel. Until the ships are repaired every passing day brings us closer to half-rations and then starvation.

*D*ay Two hundred and fifty-nine

At midday we have seen the return of the Equinox. I have been told by Faren that there is indeed a passage to the north-west, one that will take us beyond these treacherous waters and back out into the deep ocean. Captain Rendell has brought news also of a great rushing noise that resounds from the west. He cannot tell what it is,

but he says it has the same distant roar that one might find near a great waterfall, although he cannot see how this might be. Most who have heard of this discovery have taken it as an omen of land ahead, and it has served to redouble our efforts. What has not been so openly talked about is the thin line of grey that extends across the entire western horizon. According to the reports from the Equinox it has the look of a great storm building, but as of yet has not moved in our direction.

The repairs progress well aboard ship. Much has been done to restore the damage caused by the Krel, and the transfer of people and goods between ships has kept us all busy. Below decks the treatment of the injured has proven a daunting duty. Thirty-one crew and passengers were killed during the battle but almost one hundred were injured to some degree. I have been given responsibility for fourteen patients and their care has kept me below decks for most of the day. Apart from one crewman who has suffered a crushing injury to his arm the remainder are only lightly wounded, but all are in danger of infection and the cleaning of their wounds requires considerable diligence.

It is to my fortune that one of my patients is Lanja Narris. Although it is regrettable that she was injured it has given me the opportunity to provide care and attention to her in repayment for her efforts whilst I was injured at Auren'dael. I can report here however, that she has proven a most difficult patient, one who resists all attempts at care and treatment unless it is myself who administers them. Why it is that the Dwarvendim might wish only my attention is just one more small mystery that I will need to uncover before this voyage has ended.

When I have the time I have also been returning to my duties with the NomDruse. Since the attack by the Krel they have become even more withdrawn and now spend most of their day seated in small circles of eleven, murmuring to themselves in the tongues of the Haarn, and pausing only to take food and toilet themselves. None of them will say what is the purpose of their meditations, and in the gloom of their Cresh they remain transfixed upon one another, neither moving nor speaking in normal conversation. I believe now that their behaviour has become so aberrant that I may be forced to break up their number and remove them to different parts of the ship. I can see in their

manner a process of reinforcement that sees each new level of withdrawal by one mirrored in the behaviour of all, and it is leading them inexorably to a place where none of us will be able to follow. Although I have developed a great affection for the children I fear that there is nobody within the Fleet who can help them. I have talked at length with Faren and he has nothing to offer. Something must be done but there is precious little time available to do it. It is a great worry to me.

Day Two hundred and sixty-one

After an effort that has lasted day and night since the assault by the Kreel we have finally repaired all the vessels of the Fleet. None have remained undamaged by the battle but our ships have been repaired to a level that will allow us to continue on. Captain Duschet does not appear satisfied with the state of some of his ships but there can be no denial that we must now move onwards. The exploration by the Equinox has found our way into the west and there is nothing but the possibility of another attack by the Kreel if we remain upon the eastern borders of the pillars. At midday the Fleet raised anchors and with a light southerly at our backs we have returned to our journey.



Day Two hundred and sixty-three

Two days have passed since our return to sail and we have successfully negotiated our way through a wide gap in the pillars of stone. How far they might extend to the north and south is unknown, but we have made a path along a passage smashed through the stone outcrops. It is beyond our knowledge as to what titanic force might have created the strait that we passed through but it left a beckoning split in the pillars wide enough to navigate safely.

It is on the morning of this day however, that our world has become all the stranger. To the west the horizon is an unbroken line of cloud

that looms before us, and grows more formidable as we approach. The noise reported by the Equinox grows also, its roar an unending roil of sound that has become so loud that it overwhelms all the other sounds of the world. We move further westwards and with each league the grey line of the clouds ahead grow taller, the sky darkening at its edges as if it is soaking up the light of the heavens themselves. But this not all that now confronts us.

To the north and south of the Fleet a great multitude of sea-serpents now keep pace with our vessels. Vast in number the creatures slip through the waters at our sides, keeping parallel to our course but ensuring we do not deviate from a heading just north of west. The serpents are herding us to a point against the far horizon but have as yet shown no malicious intent. They do not travel close, instead they keep at a sufficient distance to allow us to navigate our way, though they remain close enough to keep us to the course they have chosen. We cannot turn back, and we cannot risk a collision with the huge creatures if we try and change our direction. They are taking us somewhere and we have no choice but to follow.

In the bluster of the wind the Dromannion keeps to its course and the Fleet follows in its wake. Only the Equinox remains in the vanguard, keeping station ahead of the Fleet as we approach the roaring bank of cloud ahead. It is difficult to tell how long it will be before we reach the Sentinels. I can only assume that the serpents are either taking us there, or leading us to our doom.

Although the world outside of the hull of the Dromannion grows stranger with each passing hour, I can record here that circumstances below decks have also become all the more unusual as well. The NomDruse have locked themselves within what remains of their Cresh and have resisted all attempts at entry. I have stood at their door and tried to negotiate for the door to be opened and have succeeded only in making the children more hardened in their resolve to let no one in. I can hear little through the door and have no idea what is going on within the Cresh. It makes a strange world all the more mysterious, and I have decided to leave the NomDruse to their own devices for the moment. Soon enough they will become hungry enough, and the door will open.

Before I close my journal on this day I must record one final note of importance. In the night past the voices have stopped. The words of Harriengaels have faded from my mind, and with his departure I have found myself once again contending only with the solitude of my own inner voice. I do not know why but the lessons have ceased, and in the night hours have left me with the barest of understandings of how the power of Shalengael should be used. I feel unprepared for what must lay ahead and find myself unable to do anything but play with the clouds overhead. I can only trust that the Gael knew what he was doing.

*D*ay Two hundred and sixty-four

Today has been spent under sail, a stiff wind at our backs pushing us closer to the roiling tempest that now blots out the entire horizon ahead, and which has now extended its swirling canopy completely across the western hemisphere of the sky. The great roar remains unabated, and the heavy smell of ash now hangs upon the air. It is a fume that has made all work above decks difficult, each laboured breath a task of its own that restricts everyone to the barest of duties. We are but a day's sail from the edge of this maelstrom and still we are being shepherded by the sea-serpents towards it. In the semi-darkness of our world it seems as if we are being drawn to the very edge of the world.

As strange as the days of our passage towards the gloom ahead may seem, I must record that some mysteries have not endured. In the quiet of the early morning the sea-serpents revealed to us their true identity. They are indeed the Amberdene, our saviours from the menace of the Behemoths, and our guides into the west of the world. Just before the rising of the suns this morning these vast creatures uncovered themselves, the sea at both sides of the Fleet erupting in long lines of light that blazoned a path in the sea towards the west. In the darkness of the pre-dawn the serpent's body began to shine in myriad points of light, their forms creating a clearly-defined path for the Fleet as we moved ever closer to the uncertainty ahead. All look to the torment before us and wonder at its purpose but we follow the Amberdene because there is nowhere else to go, and in this world they are the only allies we have.

Day Two hundred and sixty-five

The night has passed without incident and the Fleet has awoken to find the Sentinels of the Ashgard directly ahead. In the distant smouldering fogs three immense statues of pure black obsidian stand immutable within the swirling vapours of the Ashgard. We stand no more than a few hours sail from the bases of these monstrous statues and they tower over us, reaching high into the tortured vapours that rise in plumes from beneath the ocean's surface. In this unnatural world I cannot decide which is the most impressive, the Sentinels that tower before us, or the vast barrier of gushing ash that stands as a complete barrier to any movement forward.

I have no doubt that we have reached the Ashgard. What we had thought from a distance was a wide bank of swirling cloud has proven to be a far more deadly barrier. From the edge of the horizon in the south to the farthest reaches of the north a huge wall of rising ash bars our way forward. It explodes from the surface of the ocean, boiling at the water's edge before racing upwards in solid plumes of tortured ash that spread out at altitude overhead. The violence of its energies are difficult to endure even at this distance and yet we must find a way through. That is if indeed there is any world on the other side to find.

The Sentinels are no less impressive. Each statue is a vast construction of pure black stone, shrouded within the rushing vapours of the Ashgard. Of the three it is the central figure that stands nearest. Against the backdrop of swirling ash it is a robed figure of a Being with its arms extended outwards, facing the east and gesturing to those who might encounter it to halt. Its face is hooded and it stands as unidentifiable as any of the other great statues we have encountered on our journey. To the north and south of its form stands two further Sentinels, the southern pointing into the west, the northern pointing to the east. Between each of the Sentinels there lays a distance of no more than a third of a league and all stand engulfed within the raging plumes of ash. We have come to a dividing point in the world and I have no idea how we are to go beyond it.

In the spreading gloom the Fleet has come to a stop, all our ships gathering close as the Captains of all vessels come together to determine how we should answer this new challenge. I am not sure that any words will be sufficient to show how we might overcome such an unexpected maelstrom, but I have heard from Faren that the Maturi Hedj has something to say, something it is rumoured that will show us the way forward. As the day grows longer we must all wait to see what will be decided.



Day Two hundred and sixty-six

The night has passed and a vision has once again visited me in the dark hours. The voices of Harriengael and his brethren have long since left me, but this dream labours within my thoughts, a wide panorama of portent and action that I cannot ignore. In my dreams I have seen the way through the Ashgard.

It was the visage of the Maturi Hedj that first came to my sleeping hours. As a Being robed in brilliant blue he stood before me, the words of Harriengael a flowing tide of knowledge and ritual that carefully filtered down to one single thought, "think it and it shall be." Again and again the thought reverberated through my unconscious mind until it overwhelmed me, and at that moment of subjugation a new vision rose up out of a pool of shining blue light.

I saw myself standing on the foredeck of the Dromannion, arms raised and the great roaring facade of the Ashgard being drawn aside as Shalengael's power fought to make a passage through. Beyond the rushing maelstrom lay clear skies and the promise of a new beginning for the remnants of the Free Nations. Clearly I could see what had to be done. It is the power I have held close that must now be used to open the way ahead.

When I awoke from this revelation I found myself alone within our quarters. Out in the corridors I could hear the second mates rousing

the next watch and I hurried to dress and get ready for the day. It was as I went to open the door to our room that I found the Maturi standing with his hand outstretched just about to knock. I can say it was a surprise but one compounded by his opening words. In the night he had experienced the same dream as I. It was time now to see the Captain and test whether the plans of Shalengael would see us through to the New World.

Without time to utter a word of caution or objection I was taken to the wheeldeck and presented to the Captain of the Fleet. To his credit Duschet listened to what the Maturi had to say, and then spent more than a few minutes looking out over the vast expanse of the Ashgard. It was a truth that he could not deny that none of his meetings with the other Captains had brought any solution to how they were to get through. He had no options and now the Dwarvendim had brought one of his own Healer's Assistants as the answer. It was a stroke of Providence that he could not ignore, and in his own mind he knew that he had nothing to lose. It was decided without further discussion that there must be an attempt at breaching the Ashgard and that it should not be delayed any further than is necessary.

Within the hour I shall attempt to draw aside the rushing plumes of the Ashgard. Whether I have the strength for it is unknown to me. The Maturi is busy with his preparations for the attempt, and although I do not know what it is that he is doing it has given me an opportunity to sit and write these few words. I look at the great torment that extends across our horizon and I can only wonder at what it will take to breach it. Hopefully I shall survive to tell the tale.

Day Two hundred and seventy-one

There is much of what has happened in the past four days that remains a dark void within which I remember little. In these first waking hours since I lapsed into unconsciousness I have been trying to recollect my thoughts, and in that endeavour make some sense of the images and feelings that exist in my mind only as a tangle. The Ashgard has been breached and in the quiet of this morning I can sense that the Fleet sails once again into the west, a favourable breeze taking us closer to the New World. And close it is. I cannot explain

fully what I feel but there has been a change in the forces of the world. No longer do I sense power on the wind. Now the power dwells far below the surface of the sea, lying as a tangible force in the bedrock of the world. In one matter I am absolutely certain, the Ashgard was indeed a barrier, a point of contact between two immense forces of nature that cannot coexist. Beyond the plumes of the Ashgard the Hev'duil no longer holds sway and in its place there is a new power here, one that is unknown to any of us. But all of this pales beside the discovery that I have made upon waking. Shalengael is alive.

At first the images that came to me as I awoke were nothing but scattered forms of light and dark, moving shadows that slowly became recognisable as my eyes adjusted to the gloom of a darkened surgery. I found the northerner standing at the foot of the bed, his forehead creased with concern, his voice hoarse as he spoke quietly with Lanja Narris at his side. I remember that I smiled at Lanja, who then moved quickly to my side but the sight of Shalengael standing there, frail but alive, and dressed in the simple robes of a Healer's Assistant had me searching for something to say. I must admit that I was in a state that did not allow clear thought, and it has only been with the help of others that I have been able to sit and take food.

It is amazing how the act of eating can focus the mind. As I sat and considered a small plate of bread and dried meat a tide of memories flooded back to me, and within that tide the breaching of the Ashgard became clear. At midday I had attended with the Maturi a meeting with the Captains of the Fleet. The plan as it was, entailed drawing the entire fleet into an extended line behind the Dromannion and then wait for the circumstances that would allow passage through. It was the opinion of the Maturi that we had been drawn to the Sentinels for a reason, and that it would be between their immense forms that we should attempt to push aside the Ashgard. This was to be our plan of action and it would be up to myself to provide the means.

In truth I cannot remember what I was thinking as I made my way to the foredeck. The Ashgard rose before us as a solid curtain of rushing ash and steaming water, and before such unrestrained power there could not be much that could be done. But I was going to try anyway. With the Maturi at my side I stood upon the rocking foredeck of the ship and began to feel the power of the Gaels building within me.

It is this that I remember most clearly. In my mind I reached out towards the Ashgard, tentatively testing the powers that confronted me and found them to be overwhelming. The first touch echoed through my thoughts as if I had been hit by the full force of a thundering waterfall and it threw me backwards onto the hard planking of the ship. The Maturi helped me back to my feet and he began to say something, but it was drowned by the roaring of the Ashgard. In that moment of failure I remembered something that Shalengael had said many months before. The power of the Gaels he had explained, could move a mountain as easily as lift a teacup from a table. Its strength was proportionate to the thing that was needed to be done. All I had to do was think it.

With the help of the Maturi I lashed myself to the foremast of the Dromannion and began to once again reach out to the Ashgard. This time however, I did not imagine my hand pulling aside the rushing plumes as one might a curtained window. This time the image that filled my thoughts was of a great arched passage opening between the two nearest Sentinels. It was the key needed by the power of the Gaels to unleash itself.

In a coruscation of blue light all the energy that had been building within me over the preceding months exploded outwards in a spinning vortex of colour that burrowed deep into the Ashgard, throwing its steaming plumes outwards and forming a deep cavity within the fuming barrier. I could feel the power leaving me, its energy focusing on the task of forcing a passage through the Ashgard. Even as it flooded from me I knew that it would not be enough though. The energies arrayed against the blue vortex were immense and I could feel it beginning to falter, its own energy dissipating as the strength of my own will began to weaken. Alone I was not able to do it. Then I felt a small hand touch my own.

Eylish was standing beside me and from somewhere deep within her the same blue light erupted outwards, coursing through her hand into mine, merging with the growing vortex and pushing ever deeper into the Ashgard. As close as I was I could not see the remaining children of the NomDruse standing behind her, hands interlocked as a vast power arose from within them all, travelling along the chain of hands before finding its way into the vortex. In a growing conflagration of

blue energy the vortex spun faster, spewing huge amounts of ash and water outwards into the surrounding sea.

It was a titanic battle between two forces and with the added power of the NomDruse it was the Hev'duil that won through. Within the maelstrom of the Ashgard a sliver of open sea grew, expanding outwards, forming a wide arch that split the fuming ash and forced a passage through to the other side. In that moment of triumph the order was given and the first of the Fleet made their way into the breach. First went the Equinox, followed then by the Avernell and the Kalborea. One by one the ships of the Fleet passed beyond the dominion of the Hev'duil, and with each passing the battle to keep the breach open became more difficult. Even as I forced my will to the task of keeping the roiling arch open I could feel powers building within the Ashgard. It was about to fight back.

From somewhere far beneath the waves an enormous surge of energy raced for the surface, an explosive detonation of unrestrained power that hammered at the fragile breach and threatened to close it. Within a new torrent of raging ash the archway held but it was at a cost. Quickly the energy that had grown within myself and the NomDruse waned, and as it faltered the vortex drew upon the only source of power that remained to it. Me.

Only now, some four days after the event, can I piece together some idea of what happened in those last minutes that the breach remained open. I remember the last of the Fleet sailing into the arch, then the Dromannion also passing through. In those precious moments I could feel my life-force being dragged from my body, mingling with the swirling power of the vortex. So easily I could have been lost to it, but it was then that I sensed something else, another presence within the archway that took control of my consciousness and pulled me back onto the deck of the ship. Now I realise it was Shalengael, at the time I could only be grateful for the help.

Standing upon the deck of the Dromannion I felt the power of the Hev'duil falter. Quickly the combined energy of us all was drawing away, finding a new home within the vortex. It was then that I sensed the Maturi by my side. As the ship sailed through the great arch I heard him utter a few simple words into the tortured maelstrom. Above the roar of the Ashgard they rang out as clearly as a bell.

:theloth u duil shen gallel:

For a moment I searched my thoughts. The words were familiar, and in the face of the roaring power of the breach I recognised them. "Bring life from nothingness." Immediately the Ashgard began to collapse behind us. The Fleet was through but the Dromannion still sailed within the passage and as I watched the Ashgard reasserted itself, overwhelming the vortex and once again rushing upwards, closing the breach and quickly advancing upon us. I did not understand the intent of the Maturi's words but the effect proved immediate. The power that had kept the breach open had been diverted to a new cause, one that now concentrated all the energy that remained to myself and the NomDruse on a tightly forming vortex hovering upon the middeck of the Dromannion. The shift in power from the breach to the ship tore at my concentration, sending me into a swirling vertigo that left me with nowhere to go but into oblivion. My last memories of that day are of being wrapped in darkness, falling like a stone into a bottomless well of unconsciousness.

Four days now lay between our passing through the Ashgard and my awakening. My mind has cleared and I can record here that I no longer have any sign of the power of the Gaels within me. We sail in a different world now, where the sea and sky are the same but the powers of the Gaels have no place. I have had only one opportunity to go above decks and in truth I see no difference in the world beyond the Ashgard, but I feel a great heaviness that draws my thoughts down into the ocean deeps beneath me. There is something dwelling within the foundations of this new world that is somehow familiar and yet alien. For the moment however, I can find no energy to spare on thinking about it. Later I will have to find Shalengael. He has much to explain, and I feel that I am owed an explanation.

Day Two hundred and seventy-three

On this two hundred and seventy-third day of our voyage I can report that I have been judged fit enough to return to my duties. The Fleet sails before a brisk easterly wind, and we now track just north of west on a heading that we hope will take us quickly to a landfall in the New World. I have been told that the currents have changed, turning

from a warm westerly flow to a cooler southern stream. For myself this means little, but to the Captain it indicates that a substantial landmass must rest somewhere ahead of us. The flight of sea-birds into the west also brings hope that we are indeed on the right track, and it seems that barring disaster we will achieve our voyage's end and find the sanctuary that we have so long sought.

I have found as I return to my duty as Guardian of the NomDruse that these cannot be the same children I left within their Cresh before the breaching of the Ashgard. Early in the morning hours I went to their quarters to find it empty and only one flustered matron desperately trying to clear away their belongings. It would seem that a great weight has been lifted from the children, and with that impediment gone have become as boisterous, and as mischievous, as any child of Adoracia. Currently I do not know the whereabouts of half of them, and have been fielding a long litany of complaints, and complainants, regarding their activities aboard ship. It would seem that I have become custodian not of children gripped in the embrace of an unknown malady, but of urchins bereft of discipline and running amok aboard ship. I can only say that a new set of difficulties have replaced the old, and in this matter I am going to look to Shalengael for deliverance.

Of the northerner I have seen nothing. Since he stood at my bedside I have been unable to talk to him, but I have been informed that he resides in the custody of the Maturi at this time. I have found no useful information yet on his return to the Dromannion, and I have much to ask him on what he had done to myself, and even more importantly the NomDruse. The power that he instilled within me has gone but the knowledge of the Gaels, imparted by the words of Harriengael remains deeply etched into my memory. I have seen the extent of their knowledge and as an adult can accept gladly what has been given, but I worry for the NomDruse. It is my hope that he did not put them through the same intrusion for I fear that such knowledge could harm them.

Aboard the Dromannion life continues to a practised routine that has all hands busy and purposeful. The weather remains fine, the sky a vault of clear blue broken only by wisps of high cloud and a cool wind that blows out of the north-east. We have seen no sight of land yet,

only the distant mirages of phantom peaks that appear against the horizon and then disappear in the haze of the day. The New World is close. I can feel it.

Day Two hundred and eighty-one

Eight days has seen us becalmed upon the Grey Sea, the steady winds out of the north-west having left us in favour of some other part of the world. As has been the case before we find ourselves at the mercy of the current, and it flows fast into the south-west drawing us away from the landfall we know must lay to the north. It is a harrowing time, born of frustration and boredom as we wait for the wind, but as of yet it has not come.



Day Two hundred and eighty-two

For the first time I have been able to speak with Shalengael. In the early hours of another day without wind I was awoken by the Shadar Len and taken to the forecastle where I found the northerner sitting alone in the crew's galley. It was only as he stood that I was taken aback by his diminished state, his form frail and aged as he held the galley table for support. He saw my look of concern and waved it aside as if there was nothing to worry on. I was not convinced.

Carefully he returned to his seat and motioned for me to take another chair opposite him. He had the look of someone who had been drained to the point of collapse but his eyes shone just as they always had. When he saw that I was seated he asked me directly if I had any questions. For most of the morning I asked him of his purposes regarding the power he had placed within me, and his use of the NomDruse children to breach the Ashgard. Quickly he dispelled any fears I had on having done harm to the NomDruse but his answer only begged further questioning.

The knowledge of the Gaels can only be given from one to whomever will take their place, and in this manner it was Shalengael's intention that upon his ultimate demise I should replace him as the only living Gael. With no power beyond the Ashgard it was a gift of knowledge only, and it was his hope that I would take it into the New World. Such knowledge was now also the property of the NomDruse and would be passed down to each of their descendants in turn. It was something that the northerner said could not be avoided. It was the cost that had to be paid in getting the entire Fleet beyond the Sentinels.

In truth the northerner had known of his fate long before he stood upon the foredeck of the Dromannion and bombarded the Straits of Shabel into oblivion. It was his duty to follow the dictates of the visions that pervaded every aspect of his waking life. He knew that the Fleet had to meet with the Kalboreans if it was to survive the attack by the Krel. He knew that many of our number would settle in Auren'dael and that a reduced Fleet would be destroyed by the Behemoths if not for the Kalborean's knowledge of the Ambergene. Through all this he had found the path needed to make it thus far, but it was at the barrier of the Ashgard that his insight ended.

And it was the Ashgard that had been his greatest fear. He knew that it would take all the power of the Hev'duil to force a passage through the raging barrier, yet the Ashgard was there for a purpose and that very purpose meant that no power of the Hev'duil could cross over into the New World. The Ashgard was indeed a barrier that separates one force of nature from the other. Nothing of either could cross over into the other's domain without shifting the balances of the entire world. Any attempt to do so could only end in catastrophe.

For many weeks he had thought on how to deliver the energy of the Hev'duil to the Ashgard and yet also extinguish it completely so that all the Fleet might pass beyond. In the end there was only one way. At the Straits of Shabel Shalengael consigned himself to oblivion, dispersing his energy into myself and the children of the NomDruse. No longer a physical presence in the world he could do nothing but wait for the Maturi to carry out his instructions, and trust that the voices would show myself and the NomDruse the way to breach the Ashgard. Only when the Fleet passed through the barrier could the

Maturi speak the words that would call the northerner back into the physical world. Such a task it seems takes far more power than sending someone into nothingness. All that remained of the magic of the Gaels would be consumed in the task of returning Shalengael to the world of the living, and the Dromannion could then pass through the Ashgard with the breach collapsing behind. It was a convoluted plan, but it had worked. I could not help feeling a little used though.

I talked with Shalengael for a time about the children and he promised that he would do what he could to temper their new-found energy. It is a curious thing but his return to the Dromannion has left him without power and much diminished in body. I asked him what he would now do and he just smiled and raised his hand. In it he had one of the white healer's robes. As soon as he has recovered from his weakness he is to return to our ranks as a simple Healer's Assistant. He does not appear to hold any regrets for the loss of his power. If anything it seems that it is a great weight that has been lifted from him, one that will have him living as an ordinary man once again.

At midday I left the northerner to his recuperation and returned to my own duties. The winds still elude us but a chill has come into the air once again. If there is any hope of our return to sail it now beckons against the eastern horizon as a dark line of cloud that moves slowly towards us. Perhaps we shall find within the encroaching storm the winds that will take us once again into the west.

Day Two hundred and eighty-three

The storm has come and we have found the winds needed to return to our voyage. In a crashing maelstrom of rain and scudding cloud the storm hit in the midnight hours and we have ran before its bluster, cutting a path once again into the west. The Fleet rides the storm as it moves westwards and even in the pitch and rise of the swell we are beginning to see sign of land close at hand. Plant matter and mats of torn sea-grass litter the rolling waves, the current now running swiftly to the south. Expectations now run high, we all feel the closeness of a landfall ahead. I can only hope that Providence will give us an end to our search for sanctuary.

*D*ay Two hundred and eighty-four

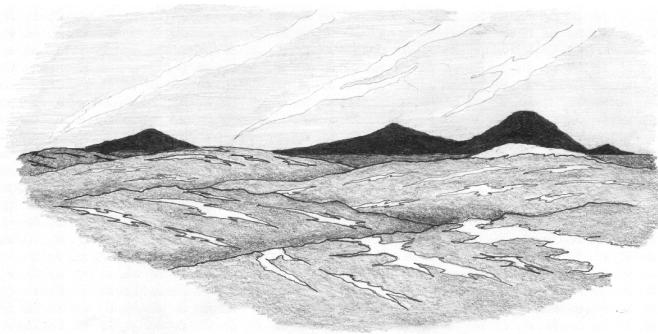
In the night we have been revisited by the Fires of Ayari, and its portent as an omen of welcome news has been well received. It was to my fortune that I happened to be returning to my quarters after a late watch in the Surgery when the call came. Such apparitions are rare indeed, and with many others I made my way to the middeck to watch as the curious energies danced upon the rigging. For many minutes the blue and orange lights worked their way along wet shrouds and ratlines before dispersing in great arcs into the air overhead. Of all the natural phenomena I have seen whilst on this voyage, whether it be rainbow or stormy tempest, it is the Fires that I find most mysterious. Omens they may be, but how and why they appear is unknown to any of us. I can only hope that the old beliefs will prove correct, and that these strange conflagrations are indeed heralds of good news.

This new day sees us riding the winds under a fair sky. With the coming of the Fires of Ayari all eyes now search the western horizon, the prospect of landfall a clear possibility. Since the early morning we have begun to see large numbers of birds on the wing, feeding in flocks to the north and east of our track. Most appear to be coastal birds and it is our hope that they have a nesting ground not too far ahead. Any high cliffs or outcrops favoured by such birds can only mean land close at hand. We keep up our watch and await the call.

*D*ay Two hundred and eighty-five

The call that we have waited for so long has come, and in the late hours of this day land has been sighted in the north-west. Immediately we have changed course and now make for a long promontory of land that will provide shelter from the winds, and a landfall upon a long stretch of open beach and high dunes. Already we can see mountains beyond and a thick covering of forest that extends into their foothills. There is none amongst us who do not believe that this is the New World. Celebration has gripped all aboard, the excitement of our discovery a tonic that has infected us all with the anticipation of dry land and a new home. After two hundred

*and eighty-five days of voyage we have found the sanctuary we seek.
May Providence give us the wisdom to treat this world kindly, and live
in peace with whomever may already reside here.*



It has been Seven Years...



Seven years have now passed since the Last Fleet of Men made landfall in the New World and there is one final entry that must be made if this journal is to be complete. It has been a time of great hardship and achievement but we have survived, and in this new land we have prospered. More than four thousand souls survived the voyage that took us into these unknown lands, and now we have made our homes here, laying the foundations of a new civilisation far beyond the malevolence of the Enemy.

Only yesterday I was talking with my wife Lanja about the events of our passage and it put me to thinking on what I had done with this old journal. A good deal of searching found it stowed away, hidden within a small chest amongst a number of other items I had kept from the voyage. Wrapped within my old Healer's robes I found it safe but definitely the worse for wear. Worn and weathered it remained as familiar to me as the day I closed it for the last time, but as I read the last few pages I realised then that it was not complete. No journal of this type should simply end without a proper accounting of the fate of those whose lives were recorded within it. We made our crossing of the wide ocean and now, seven years from our landfall in the New World, it is time to put down a final entry on what has happened to those of us who made the journey.

In this seventh year of settlement the peoples of the Free Nations and the Haarn have made a life for themselves in the New World. Over four thousand souls arrived aboard the Fleet and at last count we now number seven and a half thousand. Of the ships that made the voyage some sixteen are still in service, the remainder having no useful purpose for settlement being broken up for materials in the first year.

We have found for ourselves a wide virgin land but it has proven to be not exactly what we expected. The writings of Caren'thal the Younger recount a vast New World stretching from the highest latitudes of the north to the warm climes of the far south. In contrast to these

writings our landfall was quickly discovered to be an island of some forty leagues breadth, situated to the south of a larger landmass some two hundred leagues in extent. As is the custom of our peoples these new lands have been named for those ships that first sighted them. The smaller island has been named Equinox, the larger Dromannion.

It is upon the wider lands of Dromannion that our efforts have focused for the past years. In the midst of its grass plains we have established farming communities, and a few important settlements that have the promise of becoming major towns in the future. All that we need has been found in this great land and I have no doubt that we shall prosper, but we have discovered much more here than open plains and high mountains. There are mysteries that lay buried within the deep earth of Dromannion, mysteries which are only now being uncovered. Such things are not for this journal however. They can be left for another time.

Of the peoples who have arrived in Dromannion it has been the Kalboreans who have proven most adventurous. Captain Wilbrims and the Castaal have been engaged in exploration of the coasts and have found Caren'thal's New World further to the west. The Captain has returned from his voyages with tales of a vast continent covered in deep forest, one that could shelter the entire civilisation of the Old World within its boundaries. In his reports I have read of ancient ruins, of strange creatures and verdant forests. This immense land has been named Arborell and for the moment remains an enigma that can wait to be uncovered. For many generations to come Dromannion shall prove more than enough of a challenge.

I can record here with some satisfaction that the Faeyen Guilds have been re-established and that as a Master Potter I have been instrumental in their formation. To facilitate the growth of commerce and the skills of our professions, the Administrators have allowed the building of a number of Trade Halls that have begun the education and training of young men and women as apprentices. I myself have three apprentices under my tutelage and am looking to indenture a fourth in the new year. It can be asked by those who may read this journal as to why it might be that I have returned to my old profession. Such are the vagaries of our existence that it proved very early that the number of Healers needed whilst at sea far exceeded

that required once we had made landfall. As it was that I already had a trade I chose to return to it and have not regretted the decision. The clays of Dromannion are a fine material for the making of quality pottery and I have found a good living in that pursuit. It is true that I still provide help to Ahlek Norahm in his Surgery in the town of Landfall, however his need for assistance has lessened as he has taken on younger Assistants of his own. Life does have a way of turning out unexpectedly.

Of the Dwarvendim there is much that can be recorded. As a people they have a vigour and an enthusiasm that has put us many years ahead of where we might otherwise have been without them. As in the rebuilding of Auren'dael they quickly took control of construction first at the town of Landfall and then at Port Annihil. Their talents however, extend far beyond the construction of simple housing. In these seven years we have seen ports and seawalls, aqueducts and civic halls rise upon foundations of bare stone. The town of Landfall is a jewel of white buildings and carefully laid roads that rests against the very headland upon which we made our first grounding. The industry of the Dwarvendim has seen new settlements arise all along the coast of Dromannion, and their roads and ports have given us the means to develop commerce and trade. For the past three years the Dwarvendim have been at work on a home of their own which they have called First Hold, or in the language of the Haarn, Menion'hir. I am told that it is a great fortress that stands upon the grey cliffs of the mid coast, and that like Landfall it gleams white against the blue of sea and sky. It is my intention to take Lanja there in the spring so that she might visit with her family. To the Dwarvendim there is much owed and much to be repaid.

At now you may ask, what of Shalengael, of the Healer Faren and Captain Duschet, or perhaps the Maturi Hedj and his Shadar? All live now within the confines of the Dromannion Free State and as far as I know are in good health. The Captain retired from his post after the decommissioning of the Dromannion and now resides at Port Annihil. I am told that he has opened a shipyard and now builds fast transport ships for the coastal trades. In this endeavour I believe he has had considerable success. Of the Healer Faren it can be recorded that he now administers the Hospital at Port Annihil, and makes regular trips to Landfall to oversee the practice of Ahlek Norahm. Such is the

thoroughness of his visits that he has been a regular guest within my home as well.

For the Maturi and his Shadar the news is less certain. The building of First Hold has consumed the energies of the Dwarvendim for the past few years and I have not seen the Maturi since the foundations of that great citadel were laid. I believe they remain well and have begun to rebuild their people into the proud nation they so rightly should be. Of Shalengael I can report more definite news.

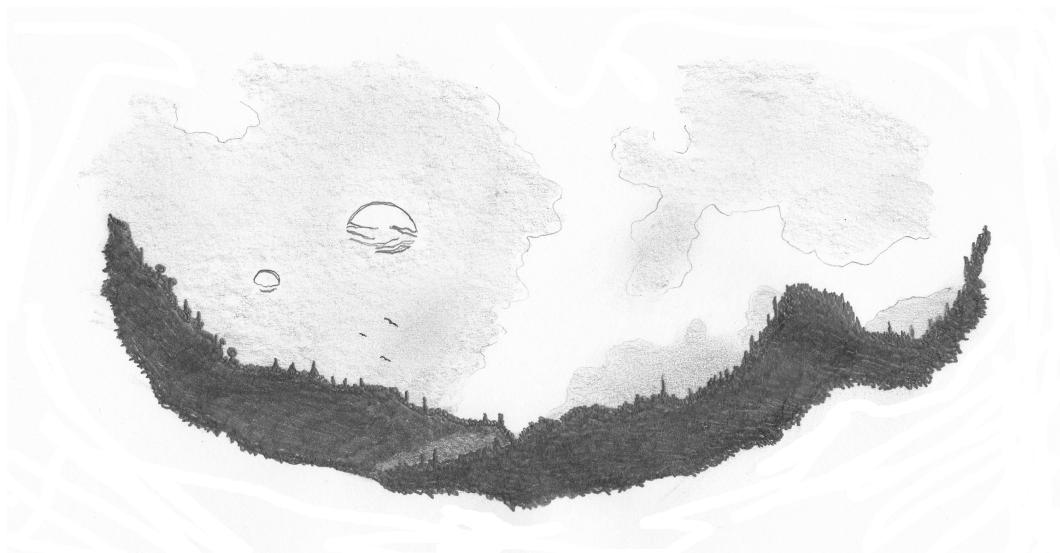
Since our landing upon these shores the northerner has focused all his energies to the task of helping the NomDruse. The children were affected greatly by the harbouring of Shalengael's power within them and more so than expected by the Gael himself. To counter the confusion of the vast store of knowledge they have inherited he has established a high sanctuary within the hinterland of Equinox that I can proudly record is known as Nahr's Retreat. There he has begun an education regime so that the children may learn to live with their knowledge and use it in the wider world. I believe that our passage to this New World has come with many costs and the ill-ease of the NomDruse is one that will take time to recoup.

It is true to record here that the costs of our passage were great, and that some regrets must be endured as well. The souls we left behind in Auren'dael were not returned for. With no power to breach the Ashgard they are now lost to us, and we must accept that whatever future may wait for our brethren is one they must face alone. In this world the Ashgard is now a barrier that cannot be crossed.

I must also record that we have had no sign of the Enemy. Seven years have passed and we have been left to live in peace. For this I am grateful.

These are the last words that I shall place within this journal. Our journey is complete and now there remains only the business of living, and the sure knowledge that hardship has not left us behind, it has simply allowed us the time to take a breath and prepare for whatever may lay ahead. For the moment life can be enjoyed and the rigours of our voyage can be left to return only as stories and legend. I do miss the strength and sureness of the Dromannion though. It was a ship

that brought me safely to these shores and I still remember the whisper and hum of its shrouds before the strength of the wind. Of those things that will stay with me it is the song of the Dromannion I will remember best. Now only the future awaits.

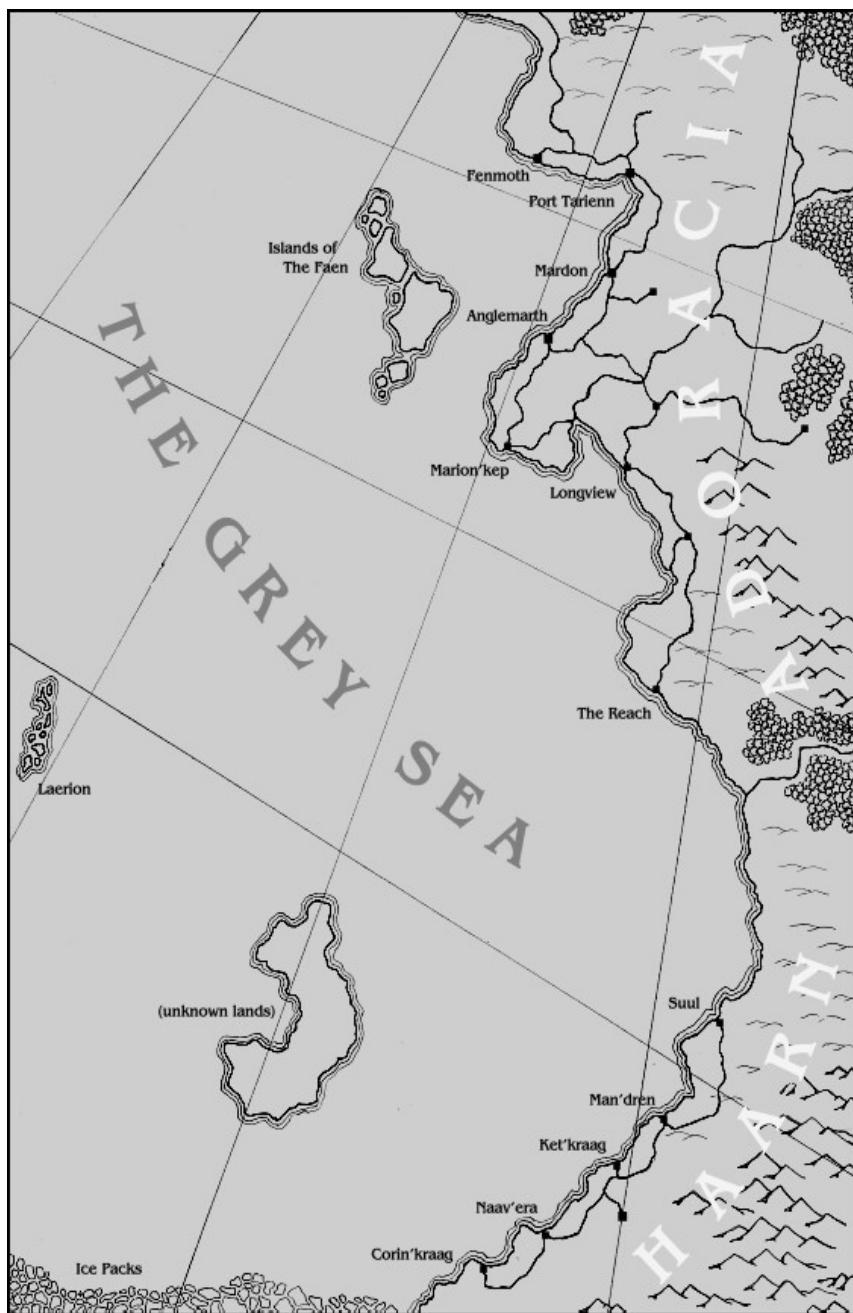


Maps of the Grey Sea

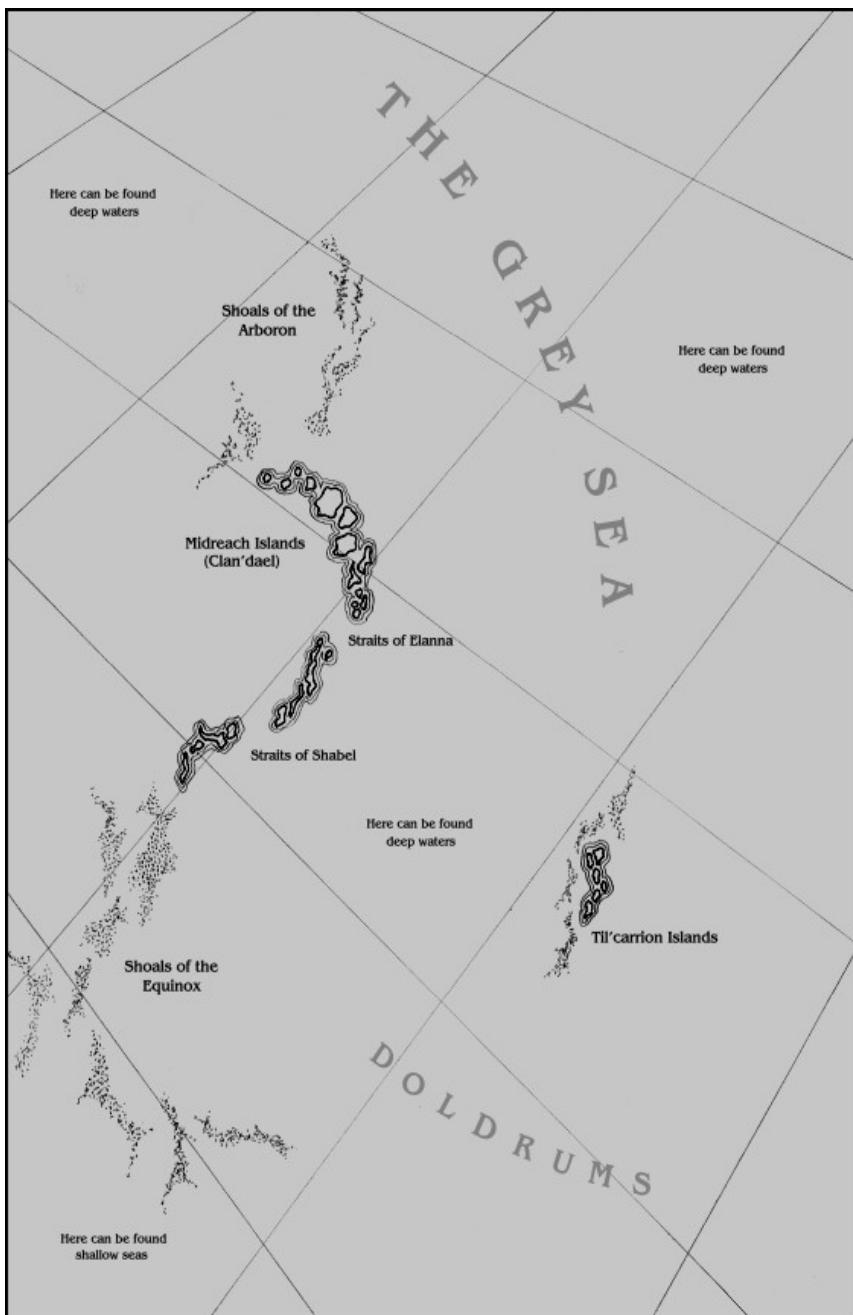


As compiled by the Cartographers of Landfall in the years
following the settlement of Dromannion

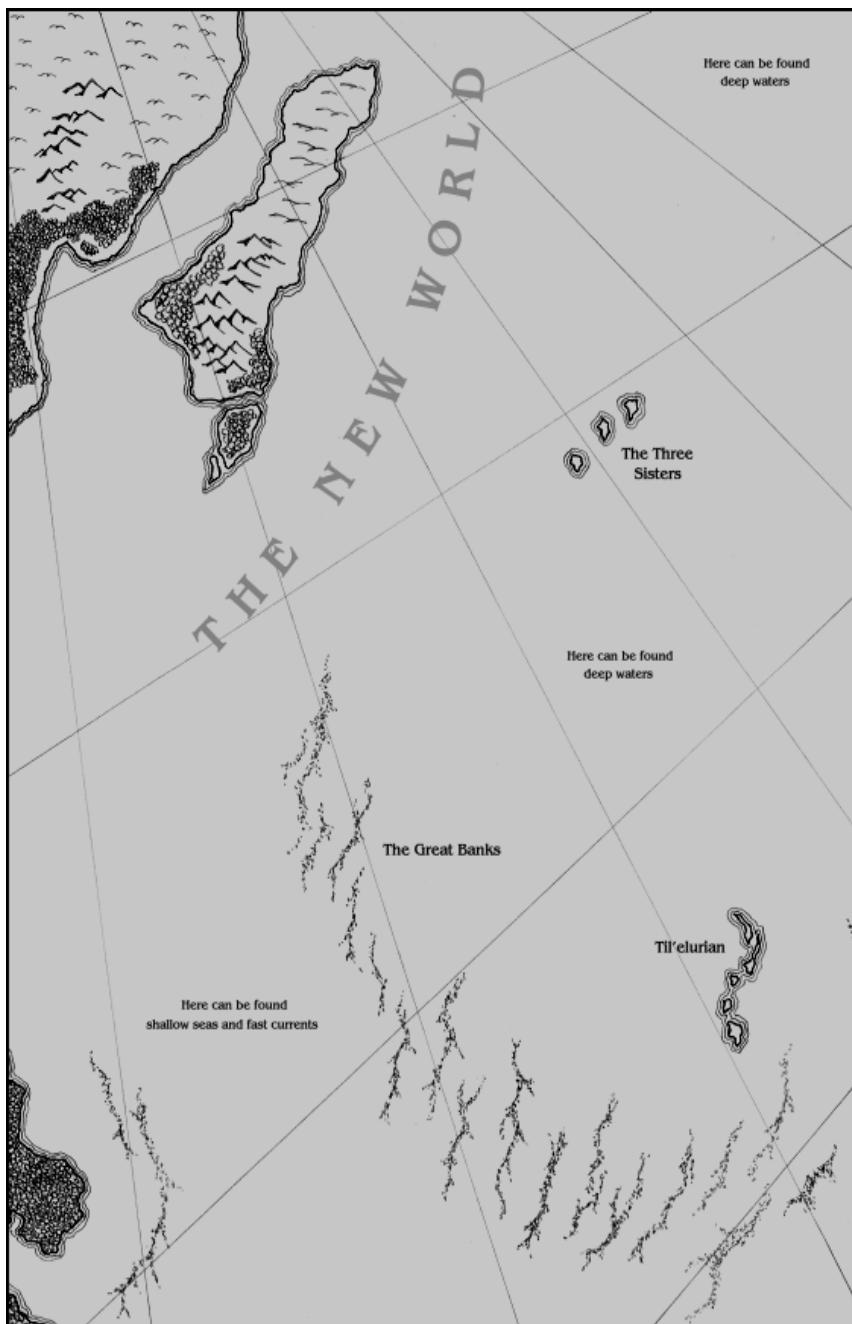
The Old World As It Was



The Midreach and Clan'dael



The Edges of the New World



SONG OF THE DROMANNION

THE STORIES OF THE FOUR NATIONS ARE MANY BUT ONLY ONE TELLS THE TALE OF THE LAST FLEET OF MEN TO LEAVE THE OLD WORLD, AND OF THEIR JOURNEY TO THE LANDS OF ARBORELL. THE SONG OF THE DROMANNION IS THAT STORY.

IN THIS JOURNAL CAN BE FOUND THE PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF A SIMPLE MAN WHO FLED THE POWER OF AN ENEMY THAT KNEW NO FEAR AND GRANTED NO MERCY. WITHIN THESE PAGES IS THE STORY OF A GREAT FLEET, ONE THAT CROSSED FROM A WORLD OF VIOLENCE AND DEATH INTO ANOTHER OF MAGIC AND UNCERTAINTY, WHERE THE EARTH ITSELF COULD COME TO LIFE, AND THE POWER TO MOVE THE HEAVENS THEMSELVES MIGHT REST COMFORTABLY IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND.

HERE FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION IS THE JOURNAL OF EMMERS NAHR, A REFUGEE FROM THE TYRANNY OF THE OLD ENEMY AND ONE OF THE FIRST SETTLERS OF ARBORELL. HIS IS A STORY OF DESPERATION AND HOPE AS THE LAST REMNANTS OF MANKIND FLEE THE POWER OF A GREAT EVIL. IN THE WEST CAN BE FOUND THEIR SALVATION. THEY NEED ONLY SURVIVE THE JOURNEY...

