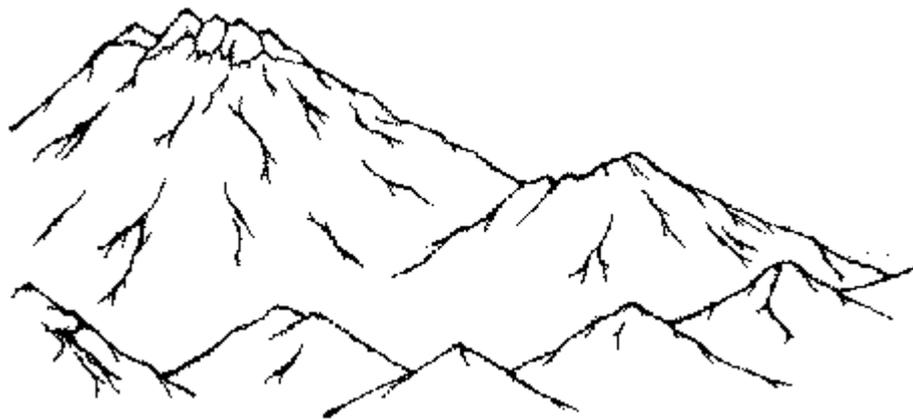


A CHRONICLES OF ARBORELL GAMEBOOK COMPANION

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# THE INQUISITOR'S LAMENT

Companion to the Windhammer Gamebook



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**CHRONICLES OF ARBORELL**



*Within these pages can be found the story of Malleus Lovar, a Historian of the LoreMages' Guild of Kalborea. Be mindful Traveller that these words tell a tale of loyalty and deception, of great valour and of secrets kept well hidden. Here you will discover the source of a brooding, malevolent evil, and find how it escaped from its dark prison to bring death and destruction to the Nations of Arborell. To begin you need only turn the page.*



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## Doubts and Mystery

The Tak Lovar waited quietly at the eastern end of the stableyards, a tall gaunt figure framed in shadow as the Dwarvendim made himself ready to depart. From a distance he watched attentively as the powerfully built man adjusted his equipment and then mounted the High Prefect's horse. Lovar was a seasoned observer of human nature and there was an air of confidence in Vesh that unsettled him. He had noticed it at their first meeting and the impression had remained as a nagging doubt in the Historian's mind. The Dwarvendim was an unknown quantity in a game that the LoreMages' Guild had been playing for too long, and now, in a time of great desperation, this thief was to be their last roll of the dice. It was a game that he felt was fast spiralling out of control, and in his mind there swirled an ocean of uncertainty.

As he waited for the Dwarvendim to leave he could see that Vesh was different from those that had previously been sent out to find the Tellandra. He was intelligent and cunning, with an inner strength that masked talents and abilities the Guild had not yet been able to identify. All who had gone before had been lost to the labyrinths of Stoneholme, or simply never heard of again; but Vesh was different and Lovar could not shake the feeling that he would be successful. The Historian's greatest concern was that nobody knew exactly what the consequences would be if he did succeed.

The Guild had decided to send the Dwarvendim out, releasing him into the frontierlands with no more supervision than a metal collar at his neck. His mission was clear, the Tellandra had been damaged by the Dragon Windhammer and it was his task to fix it. For Maenum to hold the Tellandra must be whole. It was a straightforward proposition in the eyes of the Synod but it left Lovar mired in doubt. He was not sure that sending a man such as Vesh did anything other than place the Guild at even greater peril.

He had sent letters expressing his concerns and they had been ignored. He had voiced those same concerns with his superiors in Maenum and they had effectively evaded his questions. At every turn he had been met with hindrance or hostility. There was something at hand that the Guild wished to keep hidden, and because of it he feared for all their futures. He knew also that in these thoughts he was not alone.

For years an uncertainty had been growing within the Guild, one that had begun to infest the lower ranks with a sense of malaise. To many it was apparent that the LoreMages had lost their purpose, and the Tak Lovar had seen its effects out in the wider world. The Guild's power and authority had crumbled away piece by piece, and the fact they had to resort to sending a troublemaker like Vesh on such an important task was just another example of that demise.



The clatter of Pallenten's hooves on the smooth cobble of the stableyards pulled Lovar quickly away from his musings and back to the job at hand. As Vesh disappeared out into the wide plains of Northern Kalborea Lovar turned on his heel, and began the long walk back to his quarters. It would take a while. Maenum was a big place, one that required a good pair of boots and an excellent memory for the maze of corridors and halls that made up its interior. To get anywhere required time and on some occasions a map. It was a good place to think though, there was always plenty of opportunity whilst walking between appointments to consider the issues of the day.

In the quiet of the morning he travelled the endless corridors, his footfalls echoing a steady rhythm upon the smooth stone floor of the passageways as he walked. The fortress was an austere place, designed only for the efficient conduct of warfare, however Lovar had in his years here come to call it home. It was where he worked and it was work for which he took great pride. He was a Tak, a Seeker of Truth, an Inquisitor of the Guild. There was nothing that could be asked of him that he would not do. For Lovar the Guild was everything. It was who he was.

As he made his way to his quarters his thoughts lingered on the events that had led to the release of Vesh and his coercion into attempting the mission to Stoneholme. In his role as Historian he had been given only a

small part to play, but he could not help but notice the undercurrents of intrigue that had quickly enfolded the whole affair. As can be the way with important events it had all started in such a mundane fashion.

Some two weeks earlier the High Prefect had sent for him. They had captured a young Dwarvendim troublemaker by the name of Halokim Vesh. He had been arrested whilst attempting larceny upon a Kalborean Merchant and had, apparently, put up a stiff resistance to incarceration. Quickly it became known that he had been sought by the Guild for almost two years, and was high on their list of most wanted individuals. As a felon he had been held responsible for a number of crimes against the state including the disappearance of some significant holy relics, stolen from the Guild's seat of power at Hel'garad. Most of the relics had been recovered, but Vesh had got away. Now they had him and the High Prefect had wanted a full report on who he was, and how he might have acquired his knowledge of the secret places of the Guild. There was some suspicion that he had not acted alone.

It had not taken Lovar long to discover that Vesh was far more than he may have at first appeared. From an early age the Dwarvendim had been trained at the Temple of the Suns in Das Frontiere. It was documented that he had been trained in the old tongues, had shown considerable talent in that endeavour, and that he had been identified as a possible *Shardarim*, a candidate for training in the use and manipulation of EarthMagic. Records from the temple confirmed that he was to be trained as a LoreMaster. Vesh knew none of this of course. The Dwarvendim had a long held practice of allowing prospective LoreMasters to find out for themselves the latent talents that they might possess. The Temple had been destroyed before he could be told, and now he was in their hands.

When the High Prefect received the report his response was immediate. The Guild needed the Dwarvendim and had decided his fate in a heartbeat. It had been many years since the LoreMages had captured a *Shardarim*, and with one now in their hands had begun the process of torment and interrogation that would deliver to them whatever knowledge the man may possess. This was not to be his ultimate fate however. His crimes would need to be answered also, and it was determined that once Vesh held no further value for the Guild that he would be transported to the south, and into the hands of the civil authorities in Das Frontiere. There he would be given what all enemies of the state could look forward to, public humiliation and then execution. Such would have been his fate but for the attack on Maenum. The faltering power of the EarthMagic had intervened in the Dwarvendim's favour, and had set in motion all that had transpired since.

In the dead of night Vesh had been moved to a secure prison within the walls of Maenum and the Tak Lovar had been sworn to secrecy. In a way he was mildly insulted by this. He was a loyal and obedient servant of the Guild, such an oath was not needed. No torment would have persuaded him to utter his own name, let alone anything that may have been of value to the Guild's enemies. In their wisdom his superiors had not told him exactly what it was he was swearing to, so he had decided to keep quiet about everything. In the Guild's cloistered world of politics and intrigue it was a state of affairs that could not last long.



As Lovar made his way through the halls he felt a deep shudder vibrate violently through the floorstones. For a moment he stopped, listening hard for any hint of its cause but the halls remained quiet. It was a deceptive silence that belied the great events unfolding so close at hand. On the parapets above a great battle was raging. Men were dying upon Maenum's Barrier Wall and the future of the Four Nations relied upon their stubborn resistance. The defence of all the realms to the south depended completely upon the ability of this great fortress to repel the Hordim, and Lovar had a suspicion that the walls were weakening at a rate far greater than any of them had been led to believe. So far he had been unable to test his suspicions personally, the High Prefect had refused all his attempts to find out more. It seemed that the keeping of secrets was now the greatest priority of the Guild and he was not happy about it. There were too many unknowns. As a Seeker of Truth and a Historian of the Guild the unknown was his greatest fear.

Turning a corner Lovar began to fumble for the key to his room. Just ahead, at the end of the corridor, he



should find his faithful attendant Pel waiting for him. There was much they had to do. Instead he was mildly surprised to see the High Prefect himself at his door. In the shadows of the hallway he was pacing back and forth. His ornate robes and huge bulk unable to disguise the signs of a man who did not like to be kept waiting.

"Lovar, where have you been? I sent that fool attendant of yours to get you almost half an hour ago. I told him I needed to see you immediately."

Lovar kneeled low before his Master then rose to stand. "I am sorry Sire. Pel must have missed me in the corridors. What is it that I may do for you?"

In the High Prefect's eyes Lovar could see a hardness tempered by years of scheming and intrigue. He knew that such a man only spoke with those he felt were useful to him, or those that he was about to destroy. Lovar could not tell which category he currently fell into.

"Malleus," That was a bad start. Good news never came with one's first name. "I have just received word from the Synod at Hel'garad. They have considered your latest letter and... it is probably better that we talk in private."

Lovar stepped to one side to allow the High Prefect to enter and saw his aide in the corridor. Pel stood only a short distance from the door and had been listening to every word that had been said. The Historian could see the look of concern on the boy's face, the High Prefect's demeanour a sure indication of trouble to come. Lovar motioned for him to go away and find something to do. "I'll call for you later," was all the Tak could say. With key in hand Lovar and the High Prefect entered his room.

Lovar's room was a small affair, cluttered with books and documents of all description. It was accommodation tailored to work not comfort, and was spare of furniture or decoration. The High Prefect smiled to himself, although he would not allow Lovar to see it. Lovar's room reminded him of a time when his own life had been a little less complicated. That time had long past however. He turned and looked directly at the Historian.

"Malleus, you have been of great service to me. Here in Maenum you have found favour with all the Prefects and it pains me to give you the following notification. By your own actions you have placed yourself in great jeopardy. Be aware that it has only been the favour given by your colleagues that has so far saved you from a worse fate."

With that the High Prefect's tone took on a more official edge. From his robes he pulled a small scroll and began to read.

"By order of the Synod and with the unquestioned authority of the First Prelate Magnus Oberian you, Malleus Lovar, have been charged with the crime of *uncertainty*. As of this reading you are stripped of all title and authority and must make yourself available at the earliest possible time for interrogation and discipline. Such titles and authority will be returned upon proof being uttered of your uncompromised obedience. By order of the Synod of Hel'garad."

For a moment Lovar stood quietly, stunned by such a declaration. "But why? What could I have done that would precipitate such action?"

The High Prefect sat carefully in the only chair that was not covered in scrolls and placed his hands upon his knees.

"Lovar. Have you not been taking note of the change that has occurred in the Guild? Did you really think that letters from a Tak of moderate rank such as yourself, questioning the policies of the Synod, would go unnoticed? Sending the Dwarvendim to restore the Tellandra was a decision made specifically by the First Prelate himself. They are worried about their own positions and authority, and you have given them the perfect scapegoat if things go wrong. Please believe me that they will hold onto you until they need you. I mean really Lovar, what were you thinking?"

The Historian had to take a moment to gather his thoughts. In the end he could only answer the question with another.

"Do you have no personal reservations about the consequences of sending a man such as Vesh to Stoneholme? Is it not enough that we do not know what will happen when the Tellandra is restored? What if he has the capacity to take control of it himself? He should have been interrogated first and his true power identified."

The High Prefect looked carefully at Lovar, his voice now low but full of venom, "I know you believe that Vesh's mission is ill-advised. I know also that you have spent some time researching aspects of the Guild that are dangerous to say the least. To your questions I will only answer thus, you are now suspended from all

activities within the Guild until such time as your loyalty has been tested. Do not poke your nose into the policy decisions of the Synod, they only have so much patience and it is fast wearing thin."

With that the High Prefect rose from his seat and moved towards the door. As he stepped over the threshold he turned and gave the Historian one final message.

"In two hours an escort of four Rangers will be awaiting you at the southern courtyard. They will ensure your safety until you reach Das Frontiere where you will be met by a delegation of the Synod. At that time you will be placed in custody, transported to Das Nephrim, and then remanded for interrogation. Malleus, do yourself a favour and be penitent, it will save you considerable discomfort."

Lovar watched quietly as the High Prefect disappeared down the corridor. Apart from the increasingly frequent tremors that vibrated through the stonework, all was quiet. Then he saw Pel hiding behind a large decorative vase just beyond his door.

"Well, I suppose you heard all that then?"

Pel arose from his position. "Will I be going with you Sire?"

It was a good question. The Historian would need his attendant but only to a point, there could be no advantage in placing his aide in any possible danger. "Pel, I will need you. Pack everything we should have for the trip, but you will be returning here once I have been delivered to Das Frontiere. Someone must stay with my records and ensure their safety until I return. Do you understand?"

"Yes Sire, Shall I begin packing now?"

"Do what you must but pack light, it looks like we have only a short time to put our affairs in order."

With that Pel jumped into action, pulling open the few drawers that held their clothing and other personal items. When he had finished there rested a neat line of bags and other containers arrayed across the doorway. All that remained now was to ensure the safety of his records. For the Historian life had taken a sudden and unwelcome turn.



### **The Battle for Maenum**

The morning rushed forward quicker than either Lovar or his attendant might have wished for. Within the confines of their small room they worked feverishly, stowing documents and artefacts, locking the most valuable items within a metal strongbox at the foot of Lovar's bed. Years of work resided within the four walls of the Historian's accommodations and all of it needed to be properly stowed before he could leave it. If Providence proved kind to him, and he were to return to Maenum at some time in the future, it was important that the collected treasures of his craft were secure. He owed it to the Guild to be thorough in this matter, but the deadline given by the High Prefect left little enough time to do so.

Suddenly, their work was interrupted by an enormous impact that sent a shockwave racing through the stone about them. It was followed immediately by another crushing blow, and then the urgent sounding of alarms and a multitude of shouting voices crying out in the halls beyond their door.

Grabbing his cloak the Historian rushed into the corridor and found a number of soldiers running for their stations. Pel was not far behind his master.

"What is it?" he shouted. Above them an enormous tumult was growing in the stone. It sounded like the rock was being torn asunder.

"I don't know what has happened but I will find out. Return to our room and continue with the storage of my research. I will be back shortly."

With that Lovar was swept up within the flood of men and equipment that now streamed down the main corridor ahead. With the sudden chaos generated by the alarm the Historian knew exactly where he was going. An opportunity had arisen, one that he was going to use before he was forced to leave the fortress. For some time he had been trying to gain access to the High Watchtower and at every attempt had been

turned back. Within the confusion that now reigned within the halls his Guild dress would provide him with access to any part of Maenum that he wished. It was a situation he would now make good use of.

Purposefully he moved through the labyrinth of passageways and corridors. All about him grew a frantic rush of men and equipment. Something big was happening above. In the anonymity of the pressing crowd the Historian continued on his way, unchallenged as he pushed westwards to the very edge of the fortress. It would be there that he would find an entryway to a set of stairs that led directly to the Watchtower. Hopefully answers to questions that had plagued him for weeks could be found there as well.



By definition the Historians of the Guild are curious men and Lovar was no exception. Given a question he strove relentlessly for its answer, that was his job. It was a curiosity however, that applied to questions of his own as well. He had been asked to give all relevant information to Vesh on the history of the Tellandra and the circumstances of its breakage. He knew it related in some way to the power of the EarthMagic that held the walls of Maenum intact. When he had asked for specific information on the strength of the Barrier Wall he had been given nothing more than platitude and evasion in response. He knew then that something was not right and had determined to find the answer for himself. His curiosity would not allow him to just let it rest. There were answers to be found and the High Watchtower would provide them. Quickly he walked on, taking corridors and passages that led deep into the mountainside. Eventually his persistence paid off and he found what he was looking for.

It was within a maze of deserted barracks and officer quarters that Lovar found the entrance to the stairway leading directly to the High Watchtower. As he had expected the sentry stations were deserted, and with no guard to challenge him he stepped quietly over the threshold of a large arched doorway into a vast spiral staircase, one that wound its way tightly up into the mountain above. Looking back through the staircase's entrance Lovar could see the halls beyond quickly emptying of troops. If he was to make it to the watchtower he would have to start now. With a deep breath he began the arduous task of climbing to the high parapets above.

The High Watchtower was the highest point on the fortress but sat slightly to the west of the great Barrier Wall, founded upon the steep slopes of the near mountains. Built into the stone of the mountain and extending almost sixty metres above the wall itself, it was possible to see clearly from its battlement to the mountains of the Ragan'Tor, across more than fifty leagues of the Sanhar Wastes. It was this watchtower that had raised the alarm less than three days previously. From its high elevation he would be able to test the walls and determine exactly how their strength may have diminished.

As he climbed the spiralling stairs he felt the vibrations of a great impact hammering away at the wall of the fortress to his right. With every second step a tremor ran through the stonework like a sledge rhythmically pounding at the core of Maenum. Each shudder brought with it a shower of grit and broken stone, and Lovar could feel the shockwaves driving downwards into the bedrock of the mountain itself. If this remorseless hammering kept up the Historian knew the fortress would fall. It was just a matter of time.

Above, Lovar could see the entrance to the tower's high parapet glowing red in the aftermath of sunrise. It had no door and through its opening the Historian could hear a great tumult rising. It was the pitch and cry of battle, and it grew louder as he climbed.

In the chill of the morning it was an arduous ascent. His legs were unaccustomed to such labour and if they could, would have cried out in protest at the Historian's determination to reach the heights of the ever climbing stairway. The stairs proved to be an endless series of twists and landings, with dark entrances that reached out into other corridors, and cunningly constructed defences designed to keep the Hordim from the fortress below. The Dwarvendim had built the tower almost a century before and they had built it to last. Generations of use had not worn the stairs nor lessened the precision of its construction, and as Lovar made his way upwards he was struck by the effort that must have been required to build it. Everything about the fortress was engineered on a massive scale and the staircase was no exception. It was a climb that left him



sore and fatigued but eventually he reached his objective.

When the Historian attained the top of the staircase he was met by a small landing, which led to a shallow set of stairs. From there it took only a few moments for him to reach the battlement. Pulling his robes about himself he carefully took the last few steps needed to make the uppermost level of the tower.

When he emerged into the morning light he was struck first by the bitter cold. The wind blustered from the north and carried on its breath the bite of long miles travelled across the wastelands. Within the gale stood five Dwarvendim. Three were clothed in heavy fur-lined cloaks, the tarnished patina of well-used battle armour gleaming against their sun-burned skin. The other two were signallers, busy with flags, translating orders from the three cloaked officers to the troops on the fortifications below. As the Historian was at their backs they took no notice of him, so he moved carefully over to the stone battlement and peered out into the chaos below.

Once, many years before, the Historian had been caught in an ambush carried out by bandits upon a small convoy of transport wagons. In the fight that had ensued all the bandits had died and a good number of the wagoners had met their end as well. It had been a gruesome fight, and one that Lovar had thought had hardened him to the bloodshed of deadly struggle, but he was not prepared for what he looked down upon on this bright morning.

Peering over the battlement Lovar looked into the seething chaos of the battle below and saw a desperate struggle developing. To the north the Horde Army stretched as far as the eye could see. At first it appeared completely disorganised, nothing more than a great crush of creatures and equipment trying to reach the wall. A closer look, however, quickly dispelled that impression. The Hordim were working to a plan, their Army arrayed in a series of extended battle lines, each line hauling huge siege towers to place against Maenum's great Barrier Wall. Atop each of the towers stood a pair of Mutan Shaman, dressed in grotesque robes of animal skins and carved bone, throwing what looked like wheat into the wind as their tower was laboriously dragged forward. For a moment Lovar watched quizzically as the grain blew in a great flurry towards the solid wall of the fortress. Then, without warning, commands from the Mutan sent it flying directly towards the troops lining the Dwarvendim battlements. When the grain hit the stonework it exploded in sheets of green flame that ripped viciously at the rock, flinging hapless defenders in all directions. In response a hail of arrows erupted from shielded redouts upon the wall. Mutan and Hresh alike fell beneath the withering fire, which was then answered with a further scattering of the strange grain. Still more explosions followed as the siege towers crept relentlessly forward.

It was a scene of desperation and death that appalled the Historian but it was only the beginning. To the rear of the advancing lines a thicket of siege engines and catapults hurled flaming pots of oil and the mangled remains of their dead high over the wall and into the city beyond. Fires had started there, plumes of smoke beginning to billow into the morning air. At the base of the fortress the advancing army washed up upon its stone like a tide. Multitudes fell beneath a downpour of well-aimed arrows, but the Hordim did not falter. As the siege-towers edged closer Hresh warriors began smashing huge rings of iron into the stone of the fortress, and even as their comrades fell around them, played out long coils of rope. Immediately Lovar saw the purpose of their labours. They were laying anchors for the advancing siege-towers that would be used to pull the towers close against the wall, and then secure them for battalions of Hresh warriors that stood ready to swarm onto the battlements above.

The Commanders on the High Watchtower also saw this new threat and signalled quickly to the troops below. Boiling tar and flame-arrows rained down upon the unprotected Hordim and the entire area became a sea of flame that fumed black smoke high into the air above. The Hordim could not be stopped however. As their fellow warriors burned at their side the Hresh moved forward once again, great coils of rope at their shoulders as they braved the conflagration to continue their deadly task.

All along the wall the battle raged and with each passing minute the towers of the Hordim moved closer. Within the seething masses it was the Jotun that caught Lovar's attention next. More than three metres tall, they dwarfed the Hresh and Mutan that pressed forward beneath the towers. At their belts hung huge warhammers, and all were encased in dull armour upon which red and white pigment had been splashed in a haphazard scrawl of colour. Above the clamour of the battle the Historian could hear the huge creatures exhorting those about them to even greater effort. Each appeared in command of a unit within the advancing army and in the clear light of morning they looked more fearsome than any warrior Lovar had ever seen. It was a terrifying sight.

As the Hordim advanced below, Lovar identified another battle developing upon the mountains to the

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east of the wall. Maenum had been built as a huge dam-like structure almost a kilometre in length and one hundred metres high, completely closing off the pass between the mountains on either side. The Barrier Wall as it was called stood eighty metres thick at its base and was the one defence the Four Nations had against any assault made by the Hordim from the north. Over time an entire city had grown up within the shadow of the fortress' great wall and a number of secondary defences had been built against the slopes of the mountains on either side. To the east these fortifications were also under attack.

Battalions of Morg and Hresh streamed up the steep slopes on the wall's eastern flank. Like a spreading black stain their numbers engulfed the mountainside and then hammered up against the thin edge of the Dwarvendim defences. In a clash of arms it held as a storm of arrows and explosive projectiles rained down on both sides of the fortifications. Lovar could see little through the smoke of battle but within the melee there was a gruesome hand-to-hand combat developing. Against the rising tide of Hordim stood a thin line of Dwarvendim warriors, lances gouging into the advancing creatures as they struggled to hold their position.

Lovar looked over at the commanders and could see the concern that this new assault had caused. A quick command to one of the signallers and in rapid succession highly decorated banners began appearing upon the entire length of the battlements of the Barrier Wall. Lovar knew exactly what this meant; the battle had entered a desperate and far more deadly phase.

For Kalboreans war had always been fought on the concept of never being caught in the open. Their long conflict with the Hordim had taught them that to fight an enemy superior in numbers required both speed and striking power. Ambush was met with retreat and then further ambush. For the Union a battle was never a knock down fight. It was a lesson Kalborea had learned well and it had been used to good effect on both Hordim and Man alike. An enemy was out fought and no one was classed as an innocent. A defeated enemy lost their lands, their freedom and in most cases their lives as well. Kalboreans depended on mobility and the tactics of ambush, choosing to fight only battles that could be won.

The Dwarvendim adhered to a more ancient way. For them war had a different edge. Once a banner was placed on the field of battle the unit that owned it would never leave it. No retreat, no surrender, no concept of anything other than moving forward and victory. The only other possibility was death. By the raising of the banners the Dwarvendim were telling the Horde Army that they were not intimidated by their numbers, and that they would defend the walls of Maenum until the last man. As the banners rose Lovar was sure he could see the Hresh soldiers below his vantage point smirk with anticipation, as if the last three days of battle had been nothing more than a precursor to the real violence to come.



For Lovar the fighting that followed was mesmerising; a grinding, grasping battle to the death between two foes that simply would not give an inch. The only thing standing between man and hordim was the stone wall of the Barrier itself and it proved no impediment to their ability to kill each other.

The Historian watched for some time as the battle unfolded. The siege towers of the Mutan were thrown back, and the assault upon the eastern flank faltered as a counter-attack by Dwarvendim axe-men drove the Hordim in a rout back onto the plain. Only then, when he had seen enough, did Lovar turn from the violence and concentrate on the real reason he was there. The Historian had come to check something else. He wanted to know how strong the EarthMagic holding the walls really was. To do this he would need to exercise a talent he had learned many years before, a talent important to the very core of the Guild's power.

Although the LoreMages' Guild would never admit it they were men engaged in a constant search for knowledge of the powers they wished to control. In striving for this knowledge they had found the best way to use EarthMagic was through the ancient devices of power that could still be found hidden away in the dark recesses of the world. For five generations they had scoured the length and breadth of Arborell, searching for any artefact or talisman that might be used in their quest to gain control of the magic that had been so effectively harnessed by the Dwarvendim. As far as Lovar was aware the LoreMages had been very



successful in developing their skills, and in finding artefacts that could be used to harness this extraordinary power. It all hinged however, on finding the right tools. Indeed, to be considered as a candidate for the Guild a hopeful had to demonstrate an innate ability to sense the presence of EarthMagic. It was something the Tak Lovar could do very well and it was this ability he would now exercise.

Carefully he placed his hands upon the bare stone of the watchtower and concentrated hard upon the feel of its gritty surface on his skin. Slowly Lovar could feel himself being pulled downwards as he delved for the power of the EarthMagic that lived within the foundations of the fortress. To properly ascertain its true strength he needed to start at the highest point of the structure and hence the Watchtower was the best place to begin. As if in a dream he felt his consciousness working its way through the solid rock, insinuating a path downwards, looking for that point where the EarthMagic was at its most potent.

The Dwarvendim LoreMasters had bolstered the walls of Maenum more than a century before, and he could sense the overwhelming power of the EarthMagic that resided alive and vibrant within the stone. It was something he could feel flowing through his fingers, drawing his consciousness down, deeper into the stone itself. It was a strangely welcoming sensation, one that grew all the more powerful as he persisted in his search. When he had delved to the very base of the fortress' foundations however, he found to his dismay what he feared most. The EarthMagic was vibrant, but it had begun to diminish. Each strike of the green flame being wafted on the wind by the Mutan was chipping away inexorably at its ability to hold the walls together. Given four more days of this constant hammering and it would fail. Then even the Dwarvendim would be unable to repel the Horde Army that was poised to not only destroy Maenum, but to spread over the entire southern reaches of Arborell like a plague.

In a jolt that felt like a physical blow to his consciousness Lovar drew back, disconnected himself from the focus of his search and opened his eyes. He had been closer to the powers of EarthMagic in those few moments than he had at any other time in his life and the exposure had left him light-headed. Grabbing for the surety of the stone he steadied himself and came to terms with what he had found. It was true, Vesh was the only real hope the Four Nations had. Their survival rested on the shoulders of one Dwarvendim thief.

Quickly Lovar turned from the carnage unfolding before him and made his way back down into the depths of the fortress. He was not sure how long he had tarried in his search upon the Watchtower, but he had confirmed for himself the power of the EarthMagic still residing within Maenum's walls. The long walk back to his room gave Lovar more than enough time to consider what he had discovered. As he walked he found himself trawling over the same concerns that had plagued his mind for the past weeks, but there was a new edge to his anxiety.

When the High Prefect had come to him for information on Vesh it had, at first, been nothing more than a simple request. The more he had delved into the Dwarvendim's background, the more he had found evidence of a man with unique talents and unknown potential as a wielder of EarthMagic. Such were his talents that Lovar had little doubt he could save the Four Nations, but it was also true that if he wished to do so he could set in train the ultimate demise of the LoreMages themselves.

Vesh had been sent out to find the Tellandra and restore its power. By doing so he would re-energise the Barrier Wall of Maenum and keep the Horde Army at bay. The Four Nations of Arborell would be saved. That was the plan, and the hope of the Synod. The trouble was that no one exactly knew what would happen if the Dwarvendim actually did restore the pillar of stonewood. The Tak Lovar's hope was that nothing would change. His greatest fear was that he did not know it for a fact.

Pel was waiting at the entrance to the Historian's quarters and he appeared apprehensive to say the least.

"Sire! At last you have returned. The High Prefect awaits you in the southern courtyard. He is much vexed by your tardiness."

Lovar was still deep in thought as he walked over to his aide. His own problems seemed minor compared with the risks the Synod were prepared to take. It was almost as an afterthought that he realised he did not care if the High Prefect had to wait.

"Has all my personal luggage been loaded?"

"Yes, all that is now required for your departure is your attendance in the stable. The High Prefect was not happy when he found you had not yet left."

Lovar looked at his attendant and smiled, "Don't worry Pel. They can't go anywhere without me, and I'm sure the High Prefect will do nothing but heave a sigh of relief when I'm gone. Come. Lets make our way from his place and see what the Synod might have in store for us."

With Pel in pursuit the Tak Lovar headed for the stables. It was quite a walk.



### **The Road South.**

The Historian was surprised when they finally arrived at the stables to find the High Prefect had not waited for them. Instead they found four mounted Kalborean Rangers and a fully loaded carriage. The leader of the Rangers looked too impatient to be kept waiting so Lovar and his attendant quickly clambered aboard their conveyance. Such was the haste of their escort that before they had a chance to find their seats the carriage jerked forward and they were away.

As they moved through the great arched gates of the stables Lovar settled back and considered the journey ahead. It was going to be a long day's travel. One that would end, under normal circumstances, at dusk before the gates of Miller's Crossing. Travel upon the frontier was not advisable at night even with a Ranger escort. There were too many bandit gangs roaming the wildlands to make it a safe prospect. It was an unfortunate fact that banditry had become common on the frontier and had grown worse in recent years. The civil authorities of the Kalborean city states sat in council far to the south, and in their wisdom had ignored the issue for years. As a result a disaffected criminal element has entrenched itself within the towns and settlements of the north. Thankfully the town of Miller's Crossing was a safe haven, one that provided both comfortable lodgings and high stone walls. Without delays it could be reached easily within the passage of a day.

Lovar realised that today the town might well be beyond their ability to reach by nightfall. His mission to test the walls of Maenum had put them behind schedule. He had not thought on it at the time but to make Miller's Crossing by dusk they should have left within the hour of the High Prefect's declaration. It was no wonder the Rangers seemed so disapproving.

The day had turned fine and clear and the journey proved the easier for it. For the time of the year it was remarkably warm, and the sky maintained the rich blue tinge that had been so marked at sunrise. Altogether it seemed for the Historian to be too nice a day to be concerned by any fate that may lay ahead. For all intents and purposes Lovar knew he had no control over what might happen to him within the coming weeks. It would however, take at least two days to reach Das Frontiere, and then a further five days hard travel to make Das Nephrim and then Hel'garad, the seat of power of the Guild. He decided that the time for worry would be one week hence. Till then he would enjoy the trip.

Pel sat opposite him and stared absent-mindedly out at the landscape as the carriage bucked and lurched upon the rough roadway. Lovar could see that he was stewing over something.

"Pel," he asked.

"Yes Sire."

"You have had this sour look upon your face since we left Maenum, what's wrong?"

In a way it was a redundant question, the fact that they were on their way to Hel'garad under such circumstances was probably enough to cause anyone anxiety. It would be good for Pel to air his concerns though.

"Sire, I am concerned that we travel into great danger. There has been much talk amongst the attendants and novices that you have been singled out as an example. One designed to discourage any further discord within the Guild. It gives me cause to fear for both our well-being."

The Historian spent a moment straightening the creases from his robes. It was a device he often used to give himself time to consider his response. The boy had raised a good point though. His attendant obviously had nothing to do with the issues he had raised with the Synod, but that would not stop some from trying to destroy his career as well. Unfortunately there was a chance that Pel could end up as tainted by his actions as himself and he was determined to ensure that this did not happen. After a moment he looked at his faithful



aide and responded.

"I think Pel that you have good cause for concern. But do not be too worried about your fate just yet. It is my judgement that the Guild may not have as much control of their own destiny as they may think, and if that is the case then we may yet turn out to be somewhat forgotten in the days to come."

Pel sat back in his seat and looked at the Historian. He was only an attendant, not yet even a novice, but he knew such thoughts came with considerable danger to those who might utter them. The Historian spoke again before he could ask his next question.

"Why do you think it is that I wrote that letter to the Synod expressing concern about sending the Dwarvendim off after the Tellandra? I'll tell you why. Because it was my job and my duty. Since the inception of the LoreMages' Guild the Tak have been empowered as Seekers of Truth and faithful recorders of all aspects of the histories of the Four Nations. Our duty has been to research and record everything that transpires in the world, for the express purpose of giving the Synod the information and understanding they need to govern us wisely."

"Because of this charge the Seekers of Truth have been allowed to delve into the heart of our history and, when the time requires, ask questions to better guide the investigations we undertake. The letter I forwarded to the Synod regarding Vesh was such a request, and it disturbs me greatly that it has been responded to in this fashion. It gives me cause to believe that I have touched upon something they wish kept from the light of day."

Lovar could see that he had piqued the curiosity of his attendant. It was a curiosity that would not lay idle for long, a question already on his lips.

"Sire, if the Synod finds what you have asked dangerous, why did they not simply ignore your letter? Surely difficult questions are best kept hidden by not placing attention upon them. With your summoning to Hel'garad in such a public fashion many Guildsmen will be rumouring on its portents."

The Historian smiled. Even this early in his career Pel was beginning to appreciate the politics of the Guild. He had however, asked a question that had plagued his own thoughts as well.

"Only time will tell why events have emerged in this way Pel. It has been my experience that the answers can sometimes be quite surprising."

With that the Historian and his aide returned to a quiet reflection of the passing terrain. Although a major link between the frontier and the cities of the south, the South Road was not in the best of condition. Their carriage bucked and lurched as it rolled on, passing through an alternating landscape of farms, open grassland and small isolated stands of trees.

Near midday the small convoy took time to take lunch in a grove of trees just off the main road. As Lovar had expected the Rangers kept to themselves. It was their way and he took no offence from it, but the carriage driver and his offsider maintained a careful distance from the Historian. The Guild had a power which no commoner wanted to cross. They probably didn't know who he was, nor cared why he was travelling south, but his dress automatically identified him as someone to be avoided. It was the one cost of being in the Guild that Lovar found hardest to take. It separated him from the world he was observing and made the job he had all the more difficult. Most in the Guild chose to put this separation down to the respect commoners should have for the power of the Guild. Lovar knew it had far more to do with fear.

Pel made himself busy preparing a light lunch from a hamper he had fished out of their luggage. The Historian watched his aide for a short time and then decided the day was fine enough for a short walk. He was not that foolhardy that he would leave the shelter of the grove, there were too many dangers abroad in times such as these, but he did need to stretch his legs. The trees that surrounded the small cleared area of their campsite were all large old-growth pines and it was there that he decided to take his ease. In the warmth of the midday the grove was full of the smell of pine, and as he walked into the shade provided by the high stands about him he searched the ground for any sign of danger. Within the gloom he could find nothing more noteworthy than deep carpets of scattered needles, and plenty of evidence that the grove had been used by others for the same purpose as themselves. For a moment he stood within the shadows and studied the silence. It was a state of solitude he had not known for a long time and it felt good to clear his mind and relax.

The smell of pine sap permeated the air in a thick fragrance that reminded him very much of his own home far to the south in the Malleron regions of Kalborea. There the forests of the Malleron were deep and far reaching, an endless carpet of living green; so immense that, so legend tells, it prompted the early settlers

to call the entire continent Arborell - the land of trees.

Here the trees were not so much in evidence though. The seemingly limitless grasslands of the north were punctuated only infrequently by stands such as this. The frontier was indeed a harsh place, full of sudden danger to one unaware of its pitfalls. In these lands bandits were always a threat and the weather had the capacity to kill as surely as a sword blade. And then of course, there was the Hordim. The Barrier Wall at Maenum had stopped all invasions of the south for almost a century, but it could not stop small groups from infiltrating the mountain passes in the west. Raiding parties used these torturous routes to gain access to the south and it was the responsibility of the Rangers to stop them. The Rangers appreciated the meaning of solitude. For them the mountains were both home and battleground in a conflict that knew no end. As he looked back at the campsite he was glad the Rangers were with them. It made him feel all the safer for their presence.

In the quiet the Historian found his thoughts wandering. The grove, and the smell of pine sap, stood as a small reminder of a less complicated world abandoned when he had begun his service in the Guild. Its pungent odour a familiar memory of a life left behind many years before. But that was the past. His words with Pel as they travelled south had given him pause to think on his future, and he had come to realise that there could be no way that he would be able to return to his old life. He knew that his career in the Guild was over. No amount of penitence would save him if the objectives of the Synod were truly to use him as an example. He could not expect to return to any position of authority, and in the midst of these thoughts saw himself labouring in the dry regions of the Durn, scrambling amongst the ruins of some unnamed temple, fated to spend his life in obscurity and exile. He would accept it though. Regardless of what might lay before him he was a true believer in the value of the Guild's work and would take whatever future Providence might lay before him.

Suddenly a movement to his left caused the Historian to freeze in his tracks. Lovar was near the edge of the stand, he had an unobstructed view of the undulating plain ahead, and could see clearly against a rise of hills ahead a lone rider, cloaked in purple. These were the colours of the Guild and it struck him as strange indeed, as very few of his fellow Guildsmen ventured upon the wilds alone. For a time Lovar stood his ground, sure that his position within the trees would keep him from view. While he watched the rider dismounted from his horse and lay flat upon the crest of the hill. In his hands he had something, the distance was too great to tell exactly what, but all the rider's attention seemed focused upon it. Looking to his left Lovar could see the campsite clearly. From the Purple Rider's position it was evident that he also had an unobstructed view. The man spent only a few minutes upon the ground then remounted his horse and disappeared back beyond the slope of the hills.



Puzzled by such an unusual turn of events Lovar spent a few moments considering what he should do. To tell the Rangers would be of little consequence, their only focus was the completion of their mission. If indeed the Rider was a Guildsmen they would take no action, for them it would hold little import. To Lovar however this was most important. A Guildsman was no simple bandit surveying a possible target. He was there for a purpose and was sure enough of his skill to not even bother travelling incognito. There was a suspicion growing in his mind that he was being followed. It was an idea he would need to consider, and be ready for.

Returning to the camp Lovar decided not to tell anyone of his encounter. Pel had put together an excellent lunch, one which was shared by all the company, although it took some coaxing to get the driver and his offsider to join them. By the first hour after midday the carriage was reloaded and once again they were soon bumping along the South Road.

In the warmth of the afternoon suns the journey became a series of short conversations, followed by long periods of staring out at the slowly changing terrain. Lovar noticed to the north and west a stormline brewing upon the far mountains. With the wind swinging briskly from the north-west there was a good chance it could move their way. It was only an idle thought but it struck him that they might have to spend



the night at Baellum regardless of how much ground they might hope to cover. To be caught out in a storm on the frontier was not a wise choice for many travellers had disappeared during these tempests. If the storm did move in their direction it would be just another delay in what was going to be a very long journey indeed.

By mid-afternoon the carriage and its black-cloaked outriders crested a rise and looked down upon the fortified town of Baellum. The small settlement was of a type common to these northern regions; no more than two or three hundred residents, set within a high fortified wall. At its centre stood a stone-walled Civic Hall surrounded by an open central square. From this public space the town radiated outwards, bordered on all sides by high earthen levees and a sturdy wooden palisade. Lovar had been there on a number of occasions and knew some of its inhabitants quite well. The Taverner was well known to Lovar, keeping one of the best establishments north of Das Frontiere. It was the Historian's hope that their escort might provide himself and Pel with the opportunity to sample the *Pride of Shelway's* hospitality one more time.

Looking down upon the town Lovar could see that considerable change had occurred since he last took the South Road, the normally quiet town now a hive of activity. Beyond the formidable array of pit defences that surrounded the settlement he could see a huge encampment of Kalborean soldiery. Judging by the standards and banners it was the Third Kalborean Brigade. The Historian was unaware of their current orders but Pel appeared fully informed.

"You are right Sire, it is indeed the Third. Encamped here as the first line of defence in case Maenum falls. I believe they will soon be taking up positions some ten leagues further north and await the outcome of the assault upon the Dwarvendim."

Lovar had no reason to doubt his aide. Why the Kalborean Army would wait for Maenum to fall, rather than using its resources to bolster the defence of the fortress was beyond him though.

"You seem well informed Pel?"

His attendant was eager to further impress. "Yes Sire, I have found that there are a number of advantages in taking meals at the General Mess. All the attendants gather there and a great deal of information can be gained if you choose to listen carefully."

Lovar smiled. Pel was altogether too much like himself.

"Then Pel, can you tell me why we wait for Maenum to fall rather than help it resist?"

Pel had to think for a moment. His answer sent a chill running down the Historian's back.

"I believe Sire that the Commanders have formed the opinion that Maenum will fall regardless of any help given, and they do not wish the Dwarvendim to escape upon its throwing down. They believe it is better they all die there rather than become a problem for the Army later."

In the silence that followed Lovar saw flashes of the battle he had witnessed earlier etched clearly in his mind. The Dwarvendim showed a level of bravery and persistence that was almost suicidal in its determination and this was apparently how they were to be repaid. The Historian knew only one thing for certain. With the raising of their standards the Dwarvendim were going to fight to the death anyway. They would prove no problem for the Kalborean Army if Maenum fell.

For a time the two sat quietly, immersed in their own thoughts. The carriage rolled on, bucking from side to side as its large wheels dug into deep ruts and potholes in the roadway. Lovar glanced up from his considerations just as a shadow fell across the plains outside. Looking out the window of his carriage he could see the first tendrils of high cloud advancing from the north-west. The storm was definitely coming in their direction.

"Looks like we'll be staying in Baellum for the night Pel."

The Aide glanced out the window and agreed.

The encampment of the Third Brigade was wide in extent and it took a good thirty minutes for the carriage to negotiate the maze of beasts and supply wagons that crowded the road into Baellum. It occurred to the Historian as they drove through the long lines of tents and hastily erected shelters that the encampment seemed very temporary in nature. He couldn't put his finger on it exactly but he felt some concern for these men. It was probably nothing.

By the late afternoon they finally crossed beyond the earthen defences of the town and entered the settlement proper. Within the town there were no troops to be seen, only a few officers roamed the streets, no doubt billeted in far more comfortable accommodations with the local townspeople. It took just a quick word with the leader of the Rangers to convince him that rooms at the *Pride of Shelway* were by far the most

secure quarters to spend the night. It surprised Lovar how readily the Ranger agreed.

The Taverner greeted Lovar warmly. His establishment was the largest business in Baellum, consisting of two accommodation wings and a central Tavern. Built of stone and heavy timbers, it was also one of the strongest buildings as well. With a storm on the way the Tavern was definitely the safest place to be and Lovar had money to spend. In fact the Historian had spent a great deal of money in the *Pride of Shelway* over the years, and its owner, Praud Alun, was always happy to take more of it. For the Tak and his attendant the best rooms in the house were made available, much to the consternation of the Rangers who found themselves quartered at the far end of the west wing near the stables. After getting themselves settled in their rooms, the Historian and his aide made their way to the Tavern proper for a much needed meal. In the main drinking hall they were met by a roaring fire and the noisy companionship of a full house. It was not long before Lovar found himself seated at a large table, surrounded by some of the best food available on the frontier. With Pel at his side he determined quickly that none of it would be going to waste.



### The Treachera

An hour after dusk the storm hit. Building in the north-west it had fed upon the cold of the mountains and moved quickly eastwards across the wide plains, assaulting the land with lightning and drenching rain as it went. By the time it reached Baellum its centre had become a maelstrom of towering anvil clouds, and it hit hard. Lovar was starting his second course of hot meats when the first squall line crashed into the town.

At first he took little notice, storms here were brutal affairs but the *Pride of Shelway* was built to withstand them. Like those that had passed before, this storm would vent its violence upon the unprotected frontier and then move on. As long as he and Pel remained indoors they would be safe. Then he heard the wind.

Like a physical slap across the face a gale force wind swept through the town, sending loose debris spinning off into oblivion. In the face of the onslaught the *Pride of Shelway* shuddered to its foundations as it fought the growing power of the storm. Praud Alun sensed something strange in the wind and ordered some of his attendants to set the storm shutters. Within moments the windows were sealed tight, the sounds of the wind muffled by solid wooden panels. The preparations of the Taverner could not mask the disaster that was about to unfold.

Upon the coat-tails of the raging winds rode a torrential rain that quickly turned to hail, smashing all before it with sledge-hammer blows of ice. In the rip and surge of the wind the roof of the *Pride of Shelway* creaked and groaned, struggling to hold its own against the onslaught. Then, like the opening salvo of some monstrous artillery duel lightning crashed down into the ground, arcing into unprotected buildings and exploding in great sheets of flaming wood and earth. Lovar realised then that this was no ordinary storm. The power of the tempest was building far too quickly, the lightning erupting about them in powerful staccato bursts of light that heralded ear-splitting rolls of thunder. It was no ordinary storm and its centre was heading straight for Baellum.

The few officers still in the tavern leapt to their feet, faces pale and stunned by the ferocity of the squall. Too late they realised that they had left their men unprepared upon the fields outside. Over six thousand troops lay camped outside the town's levees, sheltered only by flimsy tenting and the barest of wagon coverings. In this maelstrom there was every chance that soldiers would die this night, before an arrow had been drawn or a sword swung in anger. As one the officers raced for the door, grabbing heavy cloaks as they ran. Before the Taverner could warn them not to, they swung open the *Pride of Shelway's* double doors and were hit bodily by the force of the storm. Rushing wind slammed into the Officers, throwing them backwards, tearing the doors cleanly from their hinges. At once everything within the Tavern became chaos. Men, tables and anything loose within the establishment became just another toy for the wind. In an explosion of splintering wood and falling tilework the roof buckled and then failed. Closed and secure the

Tavern may have weathered the storm. Open to the full force of the gale from below the Tavern's roof didn't stand a chance. In a split second it disappeared up into the maelstrom above like so much leaf litter.

Lovar realised instantly what the officers were about to do and instinctively grabbed at Pel. The Aide had no idea what was about to happen, and it was only the strong hold the Historian placed upon his arm that saved him from being sucked out into the raging tempest. Framed in the rushing wind Lovar watched as the remaining timbers above buckled and were torn away. Overhead the sky was a black whirlpool of swirling cloud and crashing lightning, and mirrored in this violence he could see Pel's face, aghast at the magnitude of the power being unleashed around him. There was good reason that the locals called these storms *Treachersa* - murderers of the innocent. There was nothing they could now do but survive it.

The Taverner had at some time in the past been given the good sense to bolt all the tables in the Tavern securely to its thick wooden flooring. This may have been done to stop them being used as weapons in any of the frequent brawls that were commonplace in the *Pride of Shelway*, but it saved both of the Guildsmen. Grabbing Pel the Historian dove under the table and motioned his aide to grab a thick oaken leg. When the full brunt of the storm slammed into the Tavern the remaining structure collapsed in twisted heaps of stone and timber shoring about them. Exposed to the lethal bluster Lovar and Pel hung on for their lives as everything from men to broken wagons flew past them into the blackness beyond.

There they stayed, immobile as the *Treachersa* assaulted the world about them. For more than an hour the tempest raged. Great flurries of hail and sleet battered all who took refuge beneath the tables, shuddering blasts of thunder wracked the sky and deafened all ears that remained unprotected. It was then, at the height of the maelstrom, that Lovar first saw the phantoms.



In the rush of the storm Lovar could not say exactly when he first noticed the fleeting shapes, slipping in and out of the darkness. At first they were nothing more than shards of movement at the corner of his eye, but in the brightest of the lightning he began to make out discernible shapes. Fractured beings of darkness and shadow, they were not solid at all, but vague, smoke-like vapours that swirled in and out of view, growing in the dark and retreating from the light as they moved to the energy of the tempest. He had never seen such apparitions before. In the midst of the storm's fury he searched his memory, trying to recall some reference to their nature. Under less dangerous circumstances he might have remembered something but as he hung on for his life he could think of nothing that might explain them. These creatures were beyond his knowledge and that was enough for him to fear them.

The Historian watched as the shapes began a strange ethereal dance, one that both mesmerised him and sent a shiver running down his spine. Sometimes they seemed almost human in form, other times grotesquely distorted, moving as if they existed both in the real world and the spectral. Unaffected by the wind the phantoms stayed close to the ground, moving amongst the flying debris, pulling at any walls left standing and revelling in the chaos of it all. Within the gales they danced, supplicating themselves to the violence, rejoicing with each blast of lightning and deafening roll of thunder. Closer the shapes moved towards the huddled men. In the power of the storm Lovar could not see much, there was however a malevolence about their behaviour that struck fear into his heart; and then he discovered their real purpose.

A man was struggling to hold onto a piece of exposed timber not more than fifteen metres from Lovar's position. His face told everything of the fear in his heart, and the desperation with which he was grasping at the beam as the wind and hail hammered at his body. The phantoms saw him too, and they did not help him. While Lovar watched, one of the spectral shapes picked up a piece of timber and advanced on the poor wretch. The Historian tried to yell a warning but it was a futile gesture. In the rushing gale his cry was swept away and all he could do was watch. With one swift stroke the phantom crushed the man's arm and, with his grip released, sent him flailing off into the swirling dark. Horrified, Lovar pulled himself further under the table and watched impotently as the phantoms continued their lethal business.

Two more men were attacked and lost to the storm before the dark shapes moved on, disappearing with the storm's centre as it trailed southwards. Lovar rubbed his eyes, his mind a fog of blinding flashes and

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deafening thunder. Was it possible that these strange apparitions were just a figment of his imagination? No, he remembered the men they had killed all too clearly and it would be a memory that would stay with him for the remainder of his days. He could only believe that something new had found its way into the world, and it left him numb with fear.

When it was evident that the worst of the storm had passed, Lovar crawled out from under the table and helped Pel extricate himself from what had become a tangled crush of bodies seeking refuge from the tempest. In the rain that still persisted the two men stood surveying the wreckage that lay about them. There was little light, only the scattered glow of the evening moons available to give illumination to a scene of devastation.

All about them lay bodies, mostly soldiers, some contorted and wrapped within their tent canvasses, many still alive and suffering the most appalling injuries. In the waning light Lovar could see dimly what remained of the town and of the tavern that had been their shelter. The *Pride of Shelway* had been completely destroyed, only a stone chimney to be seen, leaning precariously like a broken finger from the rubble pile that had once been the stone walls of the building. The town had fared little better, many of its houses lay in ruins, its streets filled with mounds of tangled debris. Amongst the destruction however, Lovar could see that more than half of the town had survived, protected by the high dirt levees from the full brunt of the wind. The real devastation lay in the human toll. As his eyes adjusted to the light Lovar could see more bodies out beyond the fortifications. The fields were littered with the dead and dying, the town's pit defences choked with the ragged remains of soldiers and their equipment. In the aftermath of the storm it was quiet for only a short time.

Like the surge of a rising tide the cries of the injured swelled as the rain slackened. Within this chaos Lovar heard upon the field the first of a series of commands. Somewhere within the gloom an officer was organising the tangled mess that was his brigade. These orders were soon met with more, and within minutes the dead and injured were being separated into those that could be saved and those that were beyond help. For Lovar there was no choice to be made, he grabbed Pel and immediately made for the source of the commands. What he found was a young officer no older than his attendant, but a man who did not find the burden of this night beyond him. Quickly Lovar learned that all the senior officers of the Third Brigade had been dining at the Civic hall, a reception apparently by the town Eldermen for their protectors. In the violence of the storm the hall had folded in like an empty box and all within had been killed. For the moment at least this young officer was the only authority at hand.

Lovar volunteered his services such as they were. The Guild put great store in training their members for many roles, one of Lovar's being first aid. With Pel in hand they began the task of helping the injured. It was a task that would last all night and long into the next day.



### **An unexpected meeting.**

By the first light of morning the enormity of the losses sustained by the Brigade had become apparent. Where there had only hours before stood an organised encampment there now rested a tangle of broken wagons and smashed bodies. Those that had somehow remained uninjured spent their time finding and helping the wounded, trying to reform the remnants of their units and salvaging whatever equipment could still be recovered. All about was a scene of misery.

Lovar had spent the hours of darkness doing the best that he could. In the course of his work he had found the four Rangers who had been his escort. All were dead, crushed within the collapsing stables as they tried to quiet their terrified horses. Pel was visibly shaken by the scale of the disaster. Already messengers had been sent southwards but it would be days before any real help would arrive. Until such time as relief came the Historian could see some hard days ahead.



As the day wore on Lovar and Pel laboured alongside those that had escaped the ferocity of the storm. As is the way of disciplined troops, the uninjured soldiers quickly recovered their composure and began acting on the commands of their superiors. Casualties were laid out in long rows and separated into categories of injury and likelihood of survival. Those that were too badly injured to survive were left to their fate, only the kind attention of some village women their final succour as they lay dying. It was with the fortunate who were still able to be helped that Lovar spent most of his time. It was hard work, fraught with frustration, and made all the harder by the knowledge that no matter how hard he might toil there were just too many casualties for him to make any real difference.

At midday the Guildsmen took the time for a break. Pel had been able to find some of their personal luggage in the ruins of the Tavern's accommodation wing, and had found within a satchel some of their travel rations. Most of this they handed over to the troops but enough for a simple meal they kept for themselves. It was as they were eating that they were approached by one of the village women.

"Milord, may I have a moment?" she asked hesitantly.

Lovar placed down his food and gave her his full attention. "What can I do for you Gentlewomen? This is surely a day that will live in all our memories for many a year."

The woman was dishevelled, her dress covered in blood stains, her weathered face heavy with fatigue and loss.

"That it is Milord, but I come to you with a purpose. We have found one of yours upon the fields to the north. A rider dressed in a purple cloak and with insignia similar to your own. He is near death and asks for someone by the name of Lovar."

At the mention of his name Lovar jumped to his feet and bade her to take him to the injured man. Pel was told to return to the work at hand. The Historian said he would be back shortly. As they hurried through the casualty lines Lovar questioned her further about the mysterious Guildsman. The man's insignia was apparently identical to Lovar's so he surmised that he must be a Tak of the Guild such as himself. If it was indeed the same rider who had been following his carriage then there may be some answers at hand. Following the Townswomen Lovar was ushered past long rows of bodies to a small hut that had somehow survived the storm. Inside was the rider, grievously injured, a huge wound gaping in his chest. When Lovar saw the man's face he stopped dead in his tracks.

"Hello Lovar." His words were weak, edged with the wet sound of blood.

Lovar recognised the man instantly. It was the Tak Mah Horan, one of the most respected Historians in the Guild and one of Lovar's best friends. "Mah, what are you doing here? Last I heard of you, you were off bothering the Faeyen. What places you here at such a time?"

The man gasped for breath, his right hand clutching at his chest as blood oozed between his fingers.

"Lovar, my friend, it seems I do not have long and there is something I must tell you. I heard of your difficulty with the Synod and felt it necessary to see you before you became entangled in their intrigues. Alas, I had hoped to find you at Miller's Crossing but the *Treachersa* intervened."

Lovar looked earnestly at his friend. Mah Horan had been his teacher when he had been nothing more than a novice. Too many years had passed since their last meeting and there was much Lovar would have liked to say, but time was short. His friend would brook no small talk, he had a message to deliver.

"My friend...," A spasm of pain jerked his body as he wrestled with the loss of blood welling up from his injuries.

In a fit of concern and anger Lovar turned to the woman who had stepped back from tending his wounds. "Can you do anything for him?"

The woman just shook her head and stared intently at the floor. The Historian could see in her eyes that his friend had probably only minutes to live.

"My time is coming to an end Malleus, but there is something you must do for me, and you must do it faithfully. The Guild is in crisis, it teeters on the brink of disaster and I need you to understand why. A great danger lies before us, a danger far more malevolent than the Horde..."

Lovar shook his head to clear his mind then stepped into his role as a Seeker of Truth.

"What do you mean? I know we are at a cross-roads but surely our situation is not that dire."

The Tak Mah Horan was dying, he did not have time for explanations.

"Here me Lovar. Go to the town of Kal Chemblain on the banks of the southern Laneslem. There you will find a man by the name of Donemay. Give him my insignia and ask for all he knows of the Shadows. Do not

take no for an answer." Horan gripped the Historian's arm hard, Lovar felt the life slipping from his friend and he could do nothing about it. "This I ask of you Malleus. Do not fail me."

With that his friend died. For a time Lovar knelt beside him, carefully arranging his clothes and ensuring he was fit for burial. When this was done he removed the Tak's insignia from his neck and stood.

"Fear not my friend. Your last words will be carried to the end, no matter where they might lead."

Lovar left the hut, gave the townswomen a few coins and careful instructions as to how his friend was to be laid out. Then he went to find Pel.



### A Song of the Lunes

Finding his aide proved a daunting task. The rescue effort had resulted in more than a dozen makeshift camps being established upon the outskirts of the town's defences and Lovar had to search every one of them. For both medical and morale purposes the wounded had been quickly separated from the uninjured, and it was only then that the true cost of the storm had become apparent. More than one man in four had become a casualty of the tempest. Of these casualties more than half had died, or were going to. It was a catastrophe that the Kalborean Union would take some time to recover from, and somewhere within the remnants of the Third Brigade was Pel.

More by providence than intuition Lovar found his aide asleep at one of the medical stations. Although he felt disposed to let him rest there was something in the urgency of Horan's message that impelled him to move quickly.

"Pel! Wake up boy. There is work to do!" In his grief and frustration Lovar did not realise he was shaking his aide too hard.

The aide awoke with a start. "Sire... sorry Sire. I laid down for just a moment and..."

"Don't worry about that now, I need you to find the rest of our personal luggage, and get a hold of all the money we were travelling with. And get my thick cloak as well...and hurry up!"

Still shaking the sleep from his eyes Pel sprang to his feet and headed off into the crowd of troops and townfolk. Some five minutes later he returned. A look of despondency on his face.

"I am sorry Sire, but most of our personal belongings have been taken by the storm. I was only able to salvage these few items."

Upon the ground he threw a few pieces of clothing and a small bag. There was indeed not much remaining of their luggage, but it might just be enough for the Historian's purpose. Reaching into the bag Lovar pulled out a small piece of creased paper. Unfolding it, he checked it and gave it to Pel.

"Pel, I want you to find a merchant in the town who has not suffered damage to their business. Seek them out and give them this paper. It is a promissory note in the Guild's name for the amount of one hundred *rials*. Get the money and return here. If I am not here it will be because I am having trouble finding our young officer. Wait here until I return. Now go!"

With that Pel bolted into the crowd and was soon lost again within its throng. Lovar headed directly to the one remaining staff tent upon the fields. There he found the young officer, looking the worse for lack of sleep, but still attempting to bring order to a diminishing chaos. A number of able-bodied troops stood by his side as they planned how best to manage the disaster. The Historian did not spend long within the tent. He told the officer, who was named Durrak, that due to matters outside of his control he must leave immediately. He would be, however, leaving his attendant Pel to help with the relief effort. The Officer did not query Lovar's words, the ways of the Guild were too abstract for a simple soldier, so he wished him well and asked that Pel be sent to his tent. They were in need of a scribe to begin preparing the official casualty lists. Lovar said he would and departed. Given a choice Lovar would have wished to remain, but Horan's

assertion that the Guild was about to descend into disaster was too important to the future of the Kalborean Union to ignore. It was something that needed investigation.

Lovar found Pel waiting at their predetermined meeting place. He had been successful but it had not been an easy task.

"The promissory note has been filled Sire. The Merchant was not happy to part with such a large sum, but could not overlook the gratitude the Guild would shower upon him when it came time to collect on it."

Lovar smiled at that. The LoreMages' Guild paid a hefty interest of their notes. Most Merchants knew this, it was why most gladly gave over hard currency when requested. If this Merchant had not been happy he would be when the note was redeemed.

"You have done well Pel. Now we must go our separate ways for a short while."

The attendant stood in place shocked, but only for a moment. He could sense that their destinies had just taken an important turn. "What is it you wish me do?"

"The officer Durrak requires that you stay here and help him with the task of compiling an official casualty list. I will not be able to stay. The man I saw earlier this morning was an old friend. One who has given me an important task that cannot be ignored." For a moment Lovar paused to think then gave Pel his last orders.

"When you have finished with the lists journey south to Hel'garad and find lodgings at the attendant's barracks. Do not worry about your safety, I fear that we will be of little concern to the Synod shortly. Here is twenty silver coins. It should be enough for the journey. Wait there until I return. Then I guess we will have to deal with the vagaries of our Lords and Masters."

"Where are you going? What will I tell the Guild if they should ask?"

"As far as the Guild is concerned tell them that you know nothing. This will not be altogether untrue as I'm not going to tell you much anyway." Lovar again paused for a moment then smiled, he had just remembered something, "Pel, if they do ask where I have gone tell them that... tell them I have gone to find a ghost."

Lovar left his attendant there, money in hand and somewhat dumbfounded by his last statement. But in a way it was true. The name Donemay was known to Lovar, it had just taken him some time to remember. The context of the name's use had been all wrong though. Horan had spoken of Donemay as if he had been alive. If Lovar was right, his friend had been talking about the Prelate Artimas Donemay, one of the first LoreMages and widely regarded as the greatest of them all. The only problem was that the Prelate had been dead for more than forty years. If this was true then he was indeed on his way to find a ghost. A mystery was developing here, one that Lovar was going to solve, but he would need to be quick about it.



Before Lovar could begin his journey to Kal Chemblain he needed to find both provisions and clothing. The Historian had made the decision that he should attempt his journey to find Donemay as a civilian. The Synod maintained a wide network of spies and informants on the frontier, and he could not afford to have his departure from Baellum noticed by any of them. The words of his friend Mah Horan told him little on the nature of his quest, but the Historian knew that the truth can be a dangerous thing to pursue in times such as these. His position in the Guild came with great power and authority but he felt it better that he travel both unnoticed and unquestioned. His intuition told him it would be a safer path to follow.

Only one merchant in the town carried travel clothing so that was his first stop. The shop was small, but stocked with a wide variety of cloaks, boots and all the equipment needed to journey upon the frontier. Quickly Lovar purchased for himself a heavy cloak, a new tunic, breeches and a pair of second hand but serviceable boots. He did not wish to appear out of place amongst the people he knew he would be travelling with, so a pair of worn boots would not be as noticeable. In deciding his dress he made only one concession to vanity. For years his hair had been thinning, and in the light of day his head felt cold and exposed. A hat was his answer and he found a wide brimmed example sitting upon a stand at the back of the shop. The huge feather that adorned its side was a bit too ostentatious for his taste and was quickly pulled

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from its band. It was however, a comfortable fit and would help disguise his features upon the road. All in all he felt very much the nondescript traveller and this was the impression he wished to give to any he may meet on his way south. In this endeavour he wanted no entanglements that may come from being recognised as a Guildsman.

In addition to these items he also acquired a small pack and a spare change of clothing. A dagger was the only protection he felt he needed, and the shopkeeper had a fine range of them available. He took one for his belt and a smaller one that he slid into the top of his boot.

With the help of the shopkeeper he changed into his new clothing and carefully folded and put away the insignia of his calling. It was a strange sensation. The ornate cloak and robes of office had been his only dress for more than fifteen years, to wear the lighter civilian clothing was not unlike the lifting of a heavy weight from his shoulders. He could swear he felt ten years younger.

Thanking the merchant Lovar left his premises and began a search for what he needed in the way of food for the journey. There was not much on offer, the storm had taken its toll on both the town and its produce, but he was able to find enough for a single day's travel. It would be enough to begin. It was only then that he turned his attention to how he might travel to Kal Chemblain. The town could not be reached by road, it was a settlement situated on the banks of the Laneslem some distance to the south-east. It was well known for its isolation and the fine produce that could be grown in the rich river flats at its edge. Surrounded by swamps and dense forest the safest route to Kal Chemblain was by barge. Luckily such river transport could be found easily only a short distance to the south of Miller's Crossing, where the rapids of the upper river broadened out into wider, more navigable waters. At the Barge Depot Lovar felt sure he could obtain a passage to Kal Chemblain. He need only get to the depot quickly.

In his new guise as a traveller this would prove to be difficult. It was the one drawback of his decision to make the journey incognito. As a Guildsman he could commandeer any vehicle he might need but this would not be possible now. He would need to trust in a measure of luck to get him quickly to the Prelate Donemay. All traffic was approaching from the south, the news of disaster from Baellum had roused some relief supplies and medicines from Miller's Crossing, but few wagons or carriages were returning there. Lovar decided the best course was to begin on foot and see whether he might find a ride upon the road. Once decided he did not hesitate. The centre of Baellum had turned into a press of humanity. Most of the undamaged homes within the town had been opened to care for the wounded, and with the arrival of help from outlying farm communities the centre of town had become a hub of activity. Within the crowd Lovar could see Pel organising the distribution of food and medicine. Away from his master he was a self-assured youth who gave great credit to the Guild. Lovar watched him for a short while, pleased with the way he took charge of his duties and how men readily responded to his commands. There was a leader hiding somewhere within the young aide, one who would do great things if the Guild could survive its own folly. At one point Lovar felt sure that his attendant looked directly at him, but there was no recognition in his eyes. Without his robes of office the Historian was as unremarkable as the commoners he was rubbing shoulders with. This suited Lovar perfectly.

Pushing through the crowds he made his way to the south gate and quickly found himself upon the road to Miller's Crossing. To the south he could see a number of wagons making their way towards Baellum, hopefully loaded with supplies and with a keen interest in returning home. The Historian was sure that he would be able to obtain a ride from one of them upon their return journey to Miller's Crossing. From there it would then be only a short journey to the Barge Depot upon the banks of the Laneslem.



As the day wore on Lovar kept up a brisk pace. He knew that to walk the distance to Miller's Crossing would take at least a day and a half. If however, he was lucky enough to obtain a ride then he should be there by the evening. It was all a matter of providence. As he walked he studied carefully the country that he was passing through. The frontier was a harsh place for settlement, and the truth was that most who came here did not stay long. The extreme nature of the weather meant that farming was a perilous affair. It was a



beautiful land though, at this time of the year a rolling parade of green plains and gentle hills, criss-crossed by isolated stands of trees and the odd farmstead. The serene nature of the landscape did not make it any easier to extract a living from however. If you wanted to survive here you needed a strong arm and considerable perseverance. Such men and women did seem to find their way here, and in one way or the other they were all inextricably tied to the fortunes of the Dwarvendim.

Although it was not readily appreciated by those who lived on the frontier, the well-being of the fortress at Maenum was important not only as a bastion against the Horde, but as the commercial focus of the whole region. With its population of almost forty thousand it was a huge market for goods in these parts. Most of the agricultural activity of Northern Kalborea focused around trade and supply with the fortress. For more than one reason the destruction of the Dwarvendim would come as a heavy loss to all the towns and farms between the frontier and the provincial capital of Das Frontiere. In the calm of the day Lovar could almost feel the winds of change building on the horizon.

In the cool of the afternoon Lovar trudged onwards. The country soon changed from open grasslands to a series of shallow rolling hills through which the road wound its way southwards. To his right he began to see the first signs of the dense forests that spread in a patchwork upon the plains to the west and south. Somewhere within these forests lay the river Laneslem and just beyond the river was Miller's Crossing.

By mid-afternoon Lovar had done almost as much walking as his uncallused feet could take. On a rise to the left of the road he decided to take some rest and cool off feet that cried out in outrage at their misuse. Taking off his boots he was surprised to find both feet bleeding from blister sores at the toes and heel. Regardless of the urgency of his quest he would have to take the time to tend these wounds. His shoulders sagged with frustration as he realised it would be a while before he could again travel comfortably upon the road. With some clean rag and water he carefully washed and bound the sores, then placed a second pair of socks upon his feet to cushion them from any further harsh rubbing. With his boots back on, his feet felt better but were still too sore to continue just yet. All that he could do for the time being was to have something to eat and consider the unusual nature of his journey.

As he ate, Lovar began a careful analysis of what he knew, and the questions that his conversation with Mah Horan had raised. He had far too much respect for his old friend to consider that there was anything but absolute truth attached to his words. Somehow the Guild was in imminent peril and a man named Donemay was the key to understanding the nature of that danger. The fact that Mah Horan had planned to give Lovar this information only confirmed in the Historian's mind that the danger somehow related to his own concerns regarding the restoration of the Tellandra, and the giving of that mission to a possible *Shardarim* such as Vesh.

For a time Lovar searched his memory for anything he could remember regarding the Tellandra and the mysterious Donemay. He was engrossed in this internal quest when a loud voice interrupted his thoughts.

"Hey! I swear you'll be bandit fodder if you sit around on the grass here not watchin' what's going on around you."

Looking up Lovar stared straight into the squinting eyes of an old man, clothed in heavy weather gear and puffing at an ancient looking wood pipe. Behind him was a huge wagon, four well-muscled horses in harness, built for the heavy haulage of timber and barrelled goods. The sudden appearance of the wagoner and his charges momentarily stunned Lovar. He just sat staring at the man.

"Mute er sumpin eh? Can't talk I'll warrant. Still that don't make you immune from a good muggin in these parts. What are you doin' here? Do you need a ride someplace?"

In the end Lovar could only smile. It took a moment for him to get back on his feet and answer the man's questions.

"In answer to your first question, no I am not mute. For most of the other questions it isn't really any of your business, but if you are heading to Miller's Crossing then I can certainly use the ride. If necessary I will pay for the passage."

"Well, you're in luck but you can keep your money. After what I've been through in Baellum I just want to get back home quick smart. Get your gear together and we can keep each other company on the way."

The Historian grabbed his pack and climbed up beside the Wagoner. The bench seat was unpadded and uncomfortable but Lovar did not care. His feet were in great need of rest and Providence had blessed him with the timely arrival of this transport. He was not about to complain.

The Wagoner proved quickly to be a source of continuous conversation and unbridled misinformation. From the time he picked up the reins Lovar was accosted with the old man's views on everything from the

siege at Maenum to the unusual fluctuations of the price of smoked Sempaca meat. It was very difficult to get a single word in edgewise, but Lovar was finally able to say something when the old man stopped to take a drink from a large waterskin at his side.

"When you picked me up you said that you had been through something in Baellum. What did you mean?"

The old man leered sideways at Lovar and considered his new companion for a moment. "I tells you this only cause I can see that you is a gentlemen. Those clothes don't fool me, you talks way too nice for a traveller of the highways. I will tells you cause I know you won't laugh at my predicament."

Lovar could sense a good story in the offing. It could certainly pass the time.

"I promise I will not laugh. You would be surprised as to how interested I am in the happenings of folk such as yourself."

The wagoner smiled and then winced as the wagon hit a hole in the road.

"Bad back," he said pointing at his shoulders, "Anyway, this is what happened. There I was making me way to Baellum with a full load of gear that had taken me four days to haul from Das Frontiere. Not too heavy a load mind, mostly blankets and provender for the trade station out on the Shelwan Flats. I mean, I'm just minding me own business see, driving into the town, when suddenly I'm descended upon by a crowd of people all kicking and fighting over the stuff in the back of me tray. What a sight it was, here's me trying to get these people, who I might add I don't know from a bar of washin' soap, off my rig and then there's more of them, yelling somethin' about relief supplies and the like. I thought I'd driven into a crazy town, infected with a song of the Lunes for all I knew. I swear I couldn't do nothin' just had to let them go. No time flat I was cleaned out. Four days it had taken to get that lot to Baellum, an' you might say I was somewhat unhappy with the turn of events. Then these two troopers turn up askin' me how I had gotten there so quickly. Well, I'd had enough. One of 'em went down with the first good punch and then a whole mob took hold of me and threw me out the south gate. By the gods, I even had to creep back into that madhouse and steal my rig back. Took some doin' to. It'll be a long time before I steps back into that cage of fools, I can tell you."

The Wagoner looked at his companion, mostly to see whether he was laughing yet. Lovar did all he could to stifle the humorous edge to the old man's story, but he was glad that useful supplies had arrived in such a timely, if somewhat boisterous, fashion.

"Do not worry too much old man about the theft of your cargo. In a way you have helped a lot of people this day and I feel sure you will be recompensed for your losses."

The old man was dubious, "Well I have no idea what your talkin' about but we'll see. And have a mind who you're callin' old man, the name's Balkerik."

With that Balkerik urged his horses on and the journey to Miller's Crossing continued. To Lovar's surprise they quickly became firm friends. The old Wagoner was a store of tales and legends, most of them unique to the Faeyen and the western border regions of Kalborea. Balkerik saw the tall Kalborean as someone keenly interested in those stories and their mutual interest soon grew into respect and friendship. By the time the heavy wagon creaked within sight of Miller's Crossing, Lovar was beginning to wish he had a few days to spare so that he might properly record the old Wagoner's words. Perhaps later he would have the opportunity.



Upon a rise in the ground Lovar gained his first glimpse of Miller's Crossing. As one of the largest trading settlements in Northern Kalborea it was an important, and rich township. Completely surrounded on all sides by high walls of stone and imposing watchtowers, it was a haven in times of trouble, one the entire district had come to rely upon. Lovar had little doubt that today it would be crowded. Farmers and traders from the outlying districts would be at the markets, usually most trading was done during the last three



days of the week, and it would be an opportunity for frightened people to catch up on the latest rumour and gossip on the siege at Maenum. Everyone would be acutely aware of the importance of the battle. Very little lay between the Enemy and the rich lands of the south and upon its destruction the fate of Maenum would surely also be the fate of most of Northern Kalborea.

In Balkerik's skilful hands the heavy wagon trundled on its way, leaving the remainder of the hills behind and entering an area of dense forest and thick underbrush. Lovar had never understood why the city Eldermen had not had this area cleared away from the roadside, as it was well known as a haven for bandits and other dubious types who preyed on passing travellers. Balkerik gave an account of one such encounter as they passed through the forest and then, at a tight bend, pulled up before a long stone arched bridge that spanned the River Laneslem.

"Here is the end of your journey my friend, you wanna be set down here or in the markets?"

Lovar thought about this and then indicated the markets would be best. He would need to find his way through Miller's Crossing and then turn southwards. The Barge Depot should be only a kilometre further down the river.

As he had expected the town of Miller's Crossing was a crush of humanity. In the evening light the weekly markets were starting to wind down, but the central square was still packed with buyers and sellers, eager to get those final bargains that came with market's end. Lovar could see within the bustle of the crowd the furtive looks of unease and anxiety that pervaded the townsfolk. All manner of news would be circulating now, most probably devoid of any real truth. Balkerik himself was all but oblivious to what was happening about him. He seemed uninterested to the point of blindness as to what might be occurring beyond the reach

of his lead horses. It was no wonder that he had got himself into so much trouble in Baellum. When the wagon pulled to a stop the Historian said his goodbyes and dropped into the pressing throng. Above the noise of the crowd Lovar gave one final thank you, but the Wagoner had already urged his horses onwards and was quickly lost in a side street to the east. Within this melee of humanity Lovar was once again alone, his course clear though. To reach the Barge Depot he would need to make it to the southern gates and follow the road south. Somewhere within the groves that lined the banks of the Laneslem he would find the depot. Barring unforeseen circumstances he should then be able to buy a passage to Kal Chemblain.

In the slanting rays of last light Lovar pushed his way towards the south gates. Miller's Crossing was not a large town but had, over the years, been heavily settled by traders and merchants, most of which used the town as a base for trade with the local farming and logging districts. Within its high walls houses were built close and sometimes more than three storeys high. Streets were narrow and were in the main nothing more than alleyways, providing the barest of clearance for pedestrians wishing to travel upon them. Lovar found this to his advantage though. He did not know whether his departure from Baellum had left him a marked man, or whether the Synod, hearing of the disaster in the north, had turned their attention to more pressing matters. Either way the Historian decided the best option was anonymity and so he took the first opportunity to enter the maze of side streets and find his way quietly southwards.

After the clear air of the open road the lanes and alleyways of Miller's Crossing proved a dark and claustrophobic experience. Within dim alcoves and hidden doorways Lovar could sense the denizens of a different side to the town watching as he moved warily through their domain. Here he found the destitute and the criminal side by side, quietly marking his progress as he negotiated his way to the southern gates. He walked quickly and did not look back, holding one hand firmly gripped upon his dagger.

In the hour after dusk he had made it safely to the gates. Made of thick timbers and strapped iron they were huge imposing affairs, held open at either side by heavy metal clamps. As he approached the guard post he could see that one of the gates was leaning precariously to one side. It looked as if it had been closed in a hurry and had sprung from its fastenings. Around the damaged structure Lovar found a number of engineers in earnest discussion about how it might be repaired. The guards did not look happy, but they seemed unconcerned with those choosing to leave the town.

A cursory check by one of the gatemen delayed Lovar for only a few moments and he was soon out again upon the road, heading south.

Away from the activity of the markets the road proved noticeably quiet. The afterglow of sunset spread as a panorama of orange and deep red upon a dark horizon, providing an impressive backdrop to the wild open lands that lay before him. The forest had long been cleared to the south and west of the river, out here the land lay as a vast expanse of rolling grasses and shallow hills cut only by distant patches of woodland.



The few farms that survived here nestled close to the edges of the road, and as darkness gathered he could see the dim lights of farmhouses shining fleetingly out from behind closed doors and windows. In the quiet of the night Lovar moved southwards, enjoying the freedom of the road whilst keeping an ear out for any possible danger.

Overhead the stars emerged as pinpoints of light in a clear sky, all silent witnesses to his progress as he made his way along the empty roadway. A chill in the air, and the first blusters of a wind from the north-west urged him onwards. He had no wish to be caught in the open if another storm should rise from the mountains once again.

Within the hour Lovar came upon a rutted wagon track that veered off from the main road and headed roughly east into a dense stand of trees. In the distance he could hear the rush and murmur of the Laneslem and the Historian felt it was a good bet that this track led to the Barge Depot. A signpost stood at the roadside, loose in its footing and pointing awkwardly in the direction of the river, but long exposure to the weather had left any lettering it may have possessed indistinct and illegible. Looking back towards the town he found the road behind him deserted. In the world he appeared to be the only living thing standing, only the glow of the lights of Miller's Crossing to the north an indication of any close human habitation. Under the light of the evening moons he began a careful exploration of the track.

As he followed the deep wagon ruts Lovar felt sure that this was the right way to go. Within a few hundred metres the track turned into a small area of forest and then followed a winding path down into a wide depression. The noise of the river was growing as he journeyed on and soon the gurgle of flowing water became unmistakable. In the semi-darkness of the evening Lovar could hear the waters of the river lapping against its banks. Here the Laneslem flowed quietly, a winding waterway that spread to the south-east. At its reed-choked edge long-legged birds searched the mud for food and Lovar was struck by the change in its nature. In the north it was a raging torrent, fed by icy mountain waters and well-known for its treacherous flash floods. Here it was a different beast altogether, languid and unthreatening.

Beyond a stand of large oaks Lovar found the Depot and it was somewhat of a disappointment to say the least. On the bank of the river stood a modest pier and a small structure something like a boathouse. It rested in a bad state of disrepair, but a single light shone in the darkness from a small glazed window. There he should find the DepotMaster.

As he walked to the boathouse steps Lovar considered how he might approach the man. He was not good at deception and found it too complicating to maintain for very long. In the end he resolved to be as truthful as necessary to obtain a quick passage to Kal Chemblain.

A set of shallow steps led from the track up to the boathouse's only door. As Lovar placed his foot upon its first step he stopped. He could hear movement inside. It was the sound of a heavy man within, the floorboards creaked like they were under considerable pressure, a chair squealing as it was pulled along the boards. Without further hesitation the Historian knocked at the door. Immediately his knock was answered by a gruff response and the sound of the floor bending under stress as the occupant made his way over. To Lovar's complete surprise it was a woman who answered. Dressed in men's breeches, leather boots and a huge open-necked shirt she seemed as surprised to see Lovar as the Historian was of her.

"Well, well, what might we have here. A bit late in the day for a stroll isn't it?"

Lovar gathered his composure and bowed low. "Madam, I am sorry for the lateness of my arrival but I must find passage to Kal Chemblain as soon as possible. Can you tell me when the next barge would be leaving?"

The DepotMaster considered the Historian for a moment. She obviously had considerable practice in judging the nature of men and found no cause for concern with this one. Turning to a list hung insecurely on a nail at her left hand she studied it for a short time.

"I reckon you're in luck my late friend, the next barge should arrive here at four bells tomorrow morning and then depart again just beyond the dawn. The Barge Captain's name is Raef Namawe and should be able to give you passage. Mind you, it's gonna cost. He don't like taking anybody unless they pay up front, and in hard currency. You had better be able to do both."

Lovar assured the DepotMaster that he could indeed pay for his passage and asked for a place to sleep for the night. The woman gave him a dubious stare and then indicated the trees that ringed the boathouse. It would seem that this night he would be sleeping under the stars. He turned quickly and made his way towards the trees. Behind him he could here the Boathouse door being firmly shut and locked.

Sleeping out did not turn out to be too uncomfortable a proposition. Within a grove of trees he found a

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thick layer of leaf litter and humus that served well as the foundation of a quick bed. After a small meal and some water the Historian settled down. In the quiet of the night he spent his time wondering what the next day would bring, and speculating on how close the Dwarvendim may be to completing his mission. It was in the hour before midnight that he finally fell into an exhausted sleep.



### **A Thief in the Night**

Some two hours after midnight Lovar was awoken by the wind. From the north-west it had blown up again, cold and full of the potential for rain. At first he took little notice, it was a strong bluster, one that had kicked up small amounts of leaf litter and the odd twig, but within the grove of trees he felt protected from the worst of it. His answer to its intrusion was to roll away from the face of the wind and pull his travel cloak tighter about him. It was only then that he felt the skin at the back of his neck go suddenly cold. From somewhere deep within he had the uncomfortable feeling that he was being watched, that there might be someone at the edge of the grove, studying him. Slowly his hand fell against the dagger he still held within his boot. Lying on his side he could see nothing that appeared dangerous. Except for the rustling of the trees overhead he could hear only the sounds of wind and leaf. The feeling was, however, getting stronger. Then the sharp sound of a twig breaking only a few metres from his head spurred him to action. In one swift movement he kicked off his cloak and rolled to his feet, brandishing his dagger so that it glinted cold and metallic in the glow of the moons.

Standing completely still amongst the shadows of the trees lurked the vague silhouette of a man. Discovered, and without the element of surprise, the thief stood quietly waiting for his intended victim to make the next move. It gave Lovar a chance to size up his opponent. Tall like himself but muscular, the man also held a dagger in hand. He wore the flamboyant clothes of a Faeyen but was too heavysset to be of that ancestry. His face was still blanketed in darkness, however his posture told of a man prepared to fight for what he wanted. Somewhere he had seen the Historian's money pouch and contrived to have it for himself. Lovar did not feel disposed to hand it over.

For a short time the two men stood their ground, knives flicking coldly in the moonlight, then the shadowy figure advanced. As the thief moved forward he came out into the pale light and Lovar saw the man's face for the first time. He had the look of a Kalborean and moved with the self-assurance of someone trained in close combat. It was going to be a hard fight to win.

The Kalborean did not wait for an introduction. With dagger in hand he rushed at Lovar sweeping wide with his blade, aiming the first strike directly at the Historian's stomach. Lovar jumped back and made a more clumsy attempt at stabbing forward. The thief saw it coming and ducked to the right, positioning himself now so that he was directly between Lovar and the Barge Depot. He meant to have the Historian's money. The thief rushed forward again and raised his dagger above his head, ready to strike down at his foe. Lovar countered this and struck the thief upon the side of the head with his free arm. Such was the power of the blow that it momentarily stunned his assailant. Staggering back the thief shook his head and regained his balance. In the cold moonlight the two began circling each other once again.

Suddenly the tempo of the fight changed. From somewhere within the dark borders of the grove a huge shape rose up, wielding a long-handled shovel like an axe. One stroke of the shovel brought the thief to his knees, a shattered arm dangling by his side. The next stroke collected the side of his head and laid him out cleanly upon the ground.

"There you go Luv, I don't think he'll be botherin' anybody for a while." It was the Depot Master and she seemed well pleased with herself. "I've been after this little rodent for weeks. Knew he'd pop up sometime, especially if a purse big enough presented itself."

The look on the woman's face said it all. Flushed from the fight Lovar could not contain his anger.

"You old crone! You used me as.. as bait?"

"Oh come now, I shouldn't be usin' such disrespectful tones with someone who holds such a large shovel. Anyway, I wasn't usin' you as bait. I simply chose to let you sleep out here this night. As it was such a nice evenin' I knew you'd enjoy sleepin' under the stars."

The Depot Master grabbed the thief by his tunic, and began to drag him back to the Boathouse. When she reached the trees she turned and motioned to Lovar. He was still standing in the centre of the grove, breathing heavily and feeling very put out.

"Well, come on then. There's no point in you spendin' any more time out here. In two hours your barge'll be pullin' too and you might as well have a hot brew while you're waiting." Immediately she disappeared into the dark, dragging the hapless, groaning thief with her. Lovar stood for a second and then broke into a smile. He could not see the point in arguing with such an imposing women. Quickly he collected his few belongings and repacked his bag. At this time a "hot brew" was the best thing going and she had saved his life after all.

The remainder of Lovar's night hours were spent sitting before a roaring fire and drinking one of the Depot Master's "hot brews". He didn't know exactly what he should expect from the huge woman, but the drink itself turned out to be a concoction of chocolate, milk and a range of alcoholic leftovers. For Lovar one was more than enough. Any more and he felt sure he would quickly turn into a rolling drunk. The Depot Master had several and they all went straight to her head.



In the ensuing, slightly blurred, conversation she confessed that she had indeed used Lovar as bait, then added that there was a reward on the thief that she fully intended to collect for herself. Last of all she gave up her name, it was Imogen Dushet, and for all her great bulk it seemed to suit her very well. After a pause in her intermittent rambling she began a small interrogation of her own.

"So then my friend, why are you goin' all the way to..to Chemblain? eh? Not the nicest part of the world. Of course if you like fishing and diggin' peat out of the marshes, then it's definitely the place to go." Lovar felt no harm in being forthright with his new found acquaintance.

"Actually I am going to find a friend, someone who I think has been lost for some time."

Madame Dushet slammed her jug on the bench and gave Lovar a half-drunken leer, "A friend...what's is name? Might a heard of him round the traps."

"Actually his name is Donemay. I believe he now lives in or around Kal Chemblain."

"Donemay...Donemay" Madame Dushet was rapidly becoming incoherent but was trying to keep the conversation alive. "Donemay? Cripes, you must mean the old Prelate. What in Providence do you want with that old wizard?"

Lovar was stopped in mid-breath by the casual observance of her knowledge on the Prelate.

"How do you know the Prelate Donemay? Surely there is no common knowledge here of his existence?"

"Well why wouldn't there be? He probably doesn't know it but most of the Barge Captains have known about the old faker for good on thirty years. One of his old students recognised him when he first arrived in Chemblain. Didn't wanna spoil his little secret so didn't let on."

"And how is it that you might know this, Madame Dushet?"

The Depot Master slapped Lovar on the shoulder, " Oh come on now, don't get all high'n mighty with me. I finds out most things over a jug of hot brew. But what do you care about Donemay anyway? He's been happy growin' his mushrooms an' the like for almost three decades. Those Fakers at the Guild have left him alone so why should you wanna stir his pond. Eh? Oh cripes, suddenly everythin's going all fuzzy..."

It was the last thing Lovar ever heard the Depot Master say. The effects of her powerful drink suddenly overwhelmed her and she slumped forward onto the table, snoring loudly as her spilled drink poured quietly all over her shirtsleeves.



Lovar sat back in his chair and considered Madam Dushet's words. He found it hard to believe that a Prelate of the Guild, no matter how old, had somehow remained unknown to the Synod for such a long period of time. Especially considering it seemed to be common knowledge in these parts anyway. Still, stranger things had happened in the world, and it did confirm his suspicion that he was indeed looking for one of the most important men ever produced by the Guild. Her reference to the LoreMages as "Fakers" was somewhat disconcerting though, but it was probably the effects of the brew talking.

His thoughts were broken by the sounds of a bell ringing somewhere outside. The only window in the boathouse faced towards the river and Lovar peered out through it to see if this might be the river barge he had been waiting for.

The early morning had become wrapped in fog whilst Lovar had been drinking with Madam Dushet. Within its eerie vapours there was little he could see until the faint orange glow of a torch appeared in the darkness. Slowly a huge barge rose out of the gloom, making very little sound as it pulled too against the pier. Across its bow was emblazoned the name, "*Swan's Errant*". Quickly three men jumped from somewhere within its bulk and began fixing mooring lines to a number of posts driven into the river bottom. As soon as this was done a ramp lowered with a resounding crunch onto the wharf. The sound was soon followed by the calls of a particularly short man, as he walked quickly towards the boathouse.

"Imogen...Imogen! By the Fates you'd better not be drunk again. I've got a full load to get off before sunrise and I'm gonna need your help. Imogen!"

His cries went unheeded and when he found Lovar leaning against the side of the boathouse he was not a happy man.

"Where is that old stewpot? And who in Providence's good name are you?"

Lovar bowed respectfully and gave the Captain the news he did not want to hear.

"Madame Dushet resides within, drunk into unconsciousness, and currently sole warden to one very unhappy thief that has felt the hard edge of her shovel."

The Captain had to smile. "So she finally got that vagabond? Probably used you as bait I'll warrant? I bet that makes you feel well used?"

Lovar was not about to dispute that, however he had a more important objective in mind.

"Her ladyship has informed me that you may take paying passengers on your return journey. I am in need of quick passage to Kal Chemblain and are prepared to pay in advance."

The Captain did not hesitate in his response. "My friend, if you have the money then you've got passage to anywhere you want to go. One thing though. If you want quick passage then you're gonna have to help with the unloading. If nothin' else it'll clear your head of that god-awful concoction she's probably been fillin' you with."

For the Historian there followed two hours of hard work. As his feet had not been prepared for the rigours of the road, so his hands were unprepared for the toil that awaited him. The barge was loaded with palettes of peat and a large number of crates crammed with fresh produce for the markets of Miller's Crossing. All had to be unloaded. It was a job that left his shoulders aching and his arms feeling as if they had been tied with leaden weights, but he did what he could. Quickly the Historian learned the use of a hoist and gimbal, and along with the other eight members of the barge crew soon had their cargo neatly stacked along the wharf.

By sunrise a series of wagons began appearing along the track, their horses' breath fuming in the cold air. For the wagoners the job was just beginning, but the crew's work was done. The Captain, who insisted on being called Raef, lost no time in signing off on his cargo and getting his men back on board. At a shuffle Lovar grabbed his pack and followed the crew onto the Barge. In the half-light of dawn he watched as a set of sails were raised and the vessel slowly entered the main current of the river. By six bells the Barge was once again making way down the wide reach of the Laneslem, and one very tired Guildsman leaned against the balusters, watching the flat landscape of the river plain slowly pass by.





## The Passage of the *Swan's Errant*

The morning wore on, the waters a calm reflection of the blue sky above. Flocks of birds circled overhead as the *Swan's Errant* cut a clean wake through the Laneslem's languid flow, and as the river passed Lovar tried to find rest. It had been two days since he had found meaningful sleep but the calm of quiet slumber eluded him. There were too many questions and little enough time to find answers. His mind boiled with possibilities as he stared out at the passing terrain, trying to bring order to thoughts that raced before him, however his contemplations gave him no solace. In his fatigue all that registered were the unmistakable signs of another stormfront developing against the northern horizon, a series of grey flecked clouds that sat ominously in the distance.

Lovar had never been to The Flats, as the Barge crew called them. In fact he had never taken a river journey of any type before. About him the crew of the *Swan's Errant* hurried about their duties whilst their Captain barked orders from his position at the foredeck. The Historian could say quite truthfully that the Barge was very different from what he had expected. Squat and wide of beam, it was shallow draughted and floated something like a cork in the water. Its main propulsion was the languid current of the river and a two masted rig that allowed a pair of huge sails to billow out before the boat. Unlike most vessels he had seen the *Swan's Errant* had a raised foredeck structure, upon which stood a partially open wheelhouse. It was from there that the Captain steered and gave his commands. For all its ungainly appearance it cut through the water easily, and with a stiff wind at its back was making excellent time.

Surrounded by the activity of the vessel Lovar knew he would not find sleep so he made his way to the foredeck and stood with the Captain as the boat negotiated the wide bends and curves of the Laneslem.

"Captain Namawe, you have not yet asked for the cost of my passage. Who should I see about making payment?"

The Captain held the wheel of his barge loosely, turning it slowly as he steered his vessel around sandbars and huge floating islands of reeds. He was doing it so deftly Lovar felt he could have done it blindfolded. It took him a moment to answer.

"I believe that passage has already been paid for in full. Your work at the loading dock was more than sufficient for the passage to Kal Chemblain. However, if you wish food then go see the cook below. I am sure he will take at least one coin from you for the privilege."

Lovar felt he should protest but Raef Namawe was a man who did not brook an argument well. He had seen the outcome of at least one altercation amongst his crew, and the Captain had a biting tongue when he chose to use it. Discretion was a useful tool at times and Lovar decided to use his now.

"Captain, when do you think we will reach Kal Chemblain?"

Namawe looked at the position of the sun and then at the encroaching cloud at his rear.

"Midday I'd think. And not a moment too soon. Looks like we're in for another storm and its colour says its gunna be a beaut."

The Captain returned to his duties and the two men remained silent as the *Swan's Errant* continued upon its journey. After a time Namawe turned to the Historian.

"Your name is Lovar isn't it?"

Stunned that the Captain should know his name he took a step back and tried to compose himself. He had not mentioned his name here, nor to Madame Duset. He felt danger at hand and was not going to take any chances. He pulled his dagger and backed up further.

"Who are you? How is it that you know my name?"

The Captain smiled and waved back four members of his crew who had begun running from the aft of the ship at the first glint of Lovar's weapon.

"Come, there is no need for blades aboard the *Swan's Errant*. Explanations can be found for all manner of mysteries and there is an answer to your question... as long as you allow me to give it."

Lovar would not put down his weapon but he motioned the Captain to explain.

"You are the Tak Malleus Lovar if I am not mistaken. I was expecting you."

"How? My mission is know to no-one but myself. State your true purpose here or I swear I will..."

"Or you'll what, my over-excited friend? Remember you are aboard my vessel and I have eight trusted crew, most of whom will not appreciate having their Captain sliced and diced. Put the weapon down man. I swear if I'd thought you were going to react this way I would have had you bound and gagged first!"

Turning quickly Lovar could see now all eight of the crew standing close upon the stairs below the



foredeck. Apart from jumping into the Laneslem there was not a lot that he could do. With a shrug he placed his blade carefully upon the deck.

"There now, that's better. Now we can converse like civilised men." Namawe pointed to the dagger and one of his crew quickly picked it up and placed it within his loose clothing.

"We live in dangerous times Lovar but be assured that there is no danger here." Upon the deck there rested a number of small barrels. Namawe pulled one of them close and sat down, he motioned to another near Lovar and indicated that he should do the same. As soon as the Captain left the wheel it was manned by one of his crew, and only after Namawe was sure it was under proper control did he settle himself to talk.

"Firstly I should explain how it is that I come to know your name. The short answer is that I was told by Mah Horan to expect you. It is surprising that you came alone though, I would have thought that the old Tak would have taken advantage of another opportunity to visit Kal Chemblain."

There was no way that Raef Namawe could know that the Tak Mah Horan was dead. Lovar knew that he was one of the few people who knew of Horan's passing and it was a grievous task to have to be the one to tell the Captain. Namawe took the news stoically.

"Now that is a dark piece of news and no mistake. I have known the Tak for a good decade now and can say truthfully that it is a great loss to the Guild."

"To all of us." Lovar added, "In fact it is because of that last conversation that I must reach Kal Chemblain as soon as possible."

Namawe leant closer and his tone became conspiratorial. "Horan told me to expect you but did not say for what purpose. I will tell you now that the Captain of the *Swan's Errant* is not all that he may seem, nor is his crew. If you wish to reach Chemblain I will need to know why."

The Historian heard the underlying tension in the Captain's words. He decided quickly that he must trust this man. If there had been any malice in his character Lovar knew that he would already be floating face down in the Laneslem, and his money pouch would be swinging from Namawe's belt instead.

"I am travelling to Kal Chemblain to see the Prelate Donemay. Mah Horan indicated that information vital to the safety of the Guild could be found there, and I have the firm belief that a crisis is developing that the Prelate may be able to stop."

Namawe sat back and considered the Historian's words. "So, you know of the Prelate. This is unwelcome news and no mistake. But it is news that forces me to show my hand. The Prelate is currently the focus of both our lives Lovar. You may wish to see him but he is my responsibility. And you will only see him through me."

"Fourteen years ago I was posted to Kal Chemblain as Protector to the retired Prelate. He does not know of my existence except as Master of the *Swan's Errant*. It is very important that this remains so."

Namawe adjusted his seating and continued. "As you are aware, there is only one way to get to Kal Chemblain, and that is by the river. As Captain I know exactly who is entering the town and with the help of my 'crew', and a few other trusted men who remain within the town, I ensure the Prelate's safety."

Lovar lent forward, "You're a Ranger aren't you?"

To this the Captain nodded.

"Of a fashion but, until the Prelate dies, this is my posting. The old man has proven to have amazing longevity. He has already outlived two previous Captains, and I fear that I shall be enjoying the profits of the river for some years to come." With that the Captain sat back and awaited Lovar's response.

"Can you take me to the Prelate when we land?" he asked. How Namawe answered would determine whether Lovar could expect any further trouble from this man.

Namawe nodded his head. "My duty is to the protection of the Prelate, but Mah Horan vouched for your character. I see no danger here. Upon our arrival in Chemblain I will take you directly to the Prelate. But be warned. Any mention of my true position, or any harm that comes to the Prelate from your visit will have repercussions."

The way Namawe stressed the last word left Lovar in no doubt that the Captain's first duty was to the safety of his Prelate. And in that the Historian could see an ironic aspect to the Prelate Donemay's situation. In his own mind he believed that he was living a life of quiet retirement, the outside world content to believe him dead. And yet it would seem that most who had contact with him knew exactly who he was, but chose to leave him in peace. It was a strange situation indeed.

Now that their mutual positions were exposed the tension between the two men evaporated. Lovar and Namawe talked for a short time, mostly about the happenings in the north and the circumstances of the

decoration of the Third Brigade. Namawe was not surprised that they were so unprepared.

"It is unfortunate that they did not consider the unusual nature of the weather here. With the Dwarvendim manning Maenum there has not been much need for the Army on the frontier for almost a generation. A lack of experience will always leave you vulnerable, and it is difficult to appreciate the power of the storms until you are forced to endure one yourself. Such a loss will make the defence of the south all the harder."

With that the Captain returned to his wheel and Lovar was left to enjoy the remainder of his journey. Ahead the Laneslem widened, a number of smaller rivers and streams emptying into its volume as it flowed slowly to the south-east. The river banks were choked with reeds and there was a huge variety of bird and animal life that could be seen within. It was, in fact, one of the reasons that the town of Kal Chemblain had been established. The abundance of wildlife made for good hunting, and the higher ground inland proved to be fertile soil for market gardens, and the growth of medicinal herbs that were highly sought after by apothecaries. In spite of its isolation it was rumoured to be quite a sophisticated township. An ideal place, one might expect, to hide away from the world.

To the north Lovar could see the storm growing in intensity, watching carefully as it built great turrets of cloud upon the horizon. Again towers of cloud were billowing up from the mountains beyond, and upon the wind he could smell a vague hint of rain. Although he would not wish to be caught upon the river in a full-blown storm, his fears lay instead with Pel and the others attempting to help the remnants of the Third Brigade. Another storm of such magnitude, striking so quickly after the first would be a cruel stroke indeed. Still contemplating the storm he sat back against the deck rails and hoped that Providence would spare them this time. With nothing to do the Historian placed his feet up against a mast support and finally fell into sleep. For the remainder of his journey he slumbered as the Laneslem slowly meandered on its way.



## Kal Chemblain

At midday the barge hove too against the wharf at Kal Chemblain. The Historian did not see the *Swan's Errant* arrive, he remained deep in sleep as the crew worked about him, throwing lines and securing the vessel for unloading. It was a crewman kicking his feet aside to clear the mast that awoke Lovar from his slumber. With a start he found himself falling to the deckboards, an ungainly attempt to save himself leaving him sprawled on the rough timbers. His rest had left him stiff and sore and it took a moment for him to awaken properly. As he attempted to clear his head he rose from the deck and made his way to the deck rails for his first look at the river port of Kal Chemblain.

The town was large, quite a deal larger than he had expected, the wharf and surrounding docks carefully cut and set structures of stone. Behind the waterfront the town spread out for some distance to the east and west. With no need for a defensive wall the townspeople had built outwards, and allowed themselves not only spacious homes but generous blocks of land as well to build them on. It looked very similar to the way people built in the south, and it struck Lovar as he surveyed the tall stone warehouses that lined the docks that Kal Chemblain was a very prosperous town indeed. As he stood at the rails Namawe came up beside him.

"Not a bad place to look at in the bright light of day eh? I have a few things that must be done before we can go to see the Prelate which should take about an hour. If you like you can go for a walk and try some of the local taverns, there are three here that are particularly good. At first bell past midday I'll return, and if you're about we'll go see Donemay together."

Lovar was hungry, his last decent meal had been interrupted in Baellum by the storm so the Captain's advice was well received. The dock was a hub of activity, the empty barge the focus of attention for a number of workgangs jockeying to get their cargoes on board. All about the wharf Lovar could see stacked boxes of vegetables, fabrics piled in great rolls, and a wide range of animal pelts, racks of drying meat, and

boxes of aromatic herbs. The *Swan's Errant* seemed to be the lifeblood of the town's commerce, and with the speed with which it was being loaded would soon be setting sail once more.

From the dock the Historian made his way past the busy merchant houses and found a path to the main street. It was also in the midst of an active day's commerce. Shops and other merchant establishments lined both sides of the thoroughfare and the cobbled streets were filled with townspeople going about their business. In the centre of the street stood a large imposing building, and at the front corner a map of the town and its surrounds. Crossing the street, Lovar's curiosity, and his passion for anything cartographic, pulled him towards the map. It was a fine representation of the town and its neatly laid out streets, providing information on both the settlement and its main businesses. What surprised the Historian was that Kal Chemblain was the centre of a much larger collection of hamlets that had expanded out into the marshlands. Areas of high ground had progressively been settled and this had led to a network of roads and dikes being built to connect them all. In many ways these settlers had become self-sufficient and even in their isolation had provided for themselves all the good things of life. Looking about Lovar could see that there was nothing drab nor provincial about the town or its people. He smiled as he realised that he knew very little about this part of the world. Kal Chemblain had previously been nothing more than a point on a map to him, but in reality it was a thriving region of almost three thousand souls. Its isolation had kept it a well-guarded secret. He could see why the Prelate might choose to live here.

A further investigation of the map indicated a tavern at the end of the street to the east. With money pouch in hand he decided that a good meal would be the best preparation for his meeting with Donemay. Within the rush and bustle of the town Lovar made his way to the tavern and soon found himself at the door of the *Travellers Rest*. From within wafted the sweet smell of roasting meat and hot bread. That was enough temptation for him. With no reason to delay he pushed his way through the swinging doors at its entrance and disappeared inside.

As Lovar moved into the comfortable interior of the tavern another, more furtive figure, emerged from the anonymity of the crowd and followed him to the entrance. The man did not enter but stood near the front steps, watching carefully as the Historian ordered some food and then made his way to one of the tables. From the corner of his eye Lovar saw the man watching him as he settled down to eat. He recognised his watcher as one of the crew of the *Swan's Errant*, and had to smile at the Captain's earnest desire to trust no-one and his need to always know what was going on. It was so typical of the Rangers. Years of service as a Barge Captain had not worn the edge of his commitment to his Prelate. Lovar was determined though that no intrusion would dull the enjoyment he would find within the meal that had been laid before him. Meat, bread and a range of roasted vegetables was more food than he had seen for days and it was time to eat. With one set of eyes firmly placed upon him he began his meal.



### **The Prelate Donemay**

When Lovar had finished he paid the Tavernkeeper and returned to the street. After the relative darkness of the tavern's interior he stood for a moment upon the cobbles and let his eyes adapt to the bright sunlight of the early afternoon. Overhead the sky was clear, only a few wisps of high cloud any indication of the weather front the Historian knew was brewing to the north and west. Clear enough, he thought, but he knew that behind the crests of the high shop frontages the clean, white anvil-heads of a storm line were hiding. After his experiences with the *Treachersa* he was not keen to endure another storm just yet.

Quickly he made his way back to the wharf. The Town Hall bell rang loudly as Lovar approached the *Swan's Errant*. Not surprisingly Lovar found the Captain in earnest conversation with the crewman who had been following him on his short mission to find something to eat.

"Find a good place for a meal Lovar?" The Captain smiled broadly, his conversation with the other man

seeming to confirm the Guildsman's assertion that he was only in Chemblain to see the Prelate.

The Historian nodded in response to the question and Namawe took no time in motioning Lovar to follow him. The Captain set a brisk pace and Lovar could see Namawe wanted the visit to be over as quickly as possible.

"The Prelate Donemay lives in a cottage on the outskirts of town. He maintains a small herb garden and should be found at this time of the day working in his field."

Through the town they walked, past the main street and then out upon the main eastern road. Some ten minutes from the outskirts of Kal Chemblain, Raef Namawe came to a stop, and pointed to a small hedged field to the left of the road.

"Here is the home of the Prelate. You will find his cottage upon the northern side of the field and him probably working within his herb rows. Remember this Tak, he must not know that I pointed you in his direction, nor that he is under protection. I trust that in these matters you will be discrete."

Lovar thanked the Captain and wished him a safe voyage. Namawe looked at the darkening sky and shrugged his shoulders. Such things were always in the hands of Providence he said. Turning, he made his way back to town and was soon gone from the Historian's view.



Alone now the Historian walked beside the high hedge that surrounded the field. It was an imposing thicket of trimmed bushes that provided complete privacy for whoever may live on the other side. He discovered he could not push through its thick greenery so was forced instead to skirt its leafy borders until he found a small gate set within its eastern side. There was no name, nor sign that this was the Prelate's property, but he took Namawe at his word and opened the gate. Inside he found an open half-acre block, intensively cultivated with a myriad of herds and low bushes. To his right stood a small stone cottage and upon the western border of the field Lovar could see a hunched shape, bent low against a row of brightly coloured plants.

Carefully Lovar negotiated the small rows of herbs and vegetables, not wishing to damage anything in his passing. As he moved towards the Prelate he heard the ominous rumbling of the storm. The air had become charged and Lovar could feel the hair on his bare arm standing up in response to its energy. The Prelate himself, also heard the distant grumble and stopped his determined fork work to stare at the sky. Standing, he stretched his back, and Lovar got his first look at the mysterious Prelate; one who was supposed to be dead but was apparently as alive as himself.

He was old, almost withered to a fashion, but he still had strength in his back and arms. Dressed in a drab set of farming overalls and an old brown tunic, he looked as unremarkable as any other farm worker Lovar might have passed unnoticed upon the road. Most surprisingly his hair was still jet black, there was not a scrap of grey, and this intrigued the Historian. Too many times he had looked in the mirror and seen the steady growth of grey through his own hair, and yet he could not be more than a third the age of the old Prelate. Given a chance Lovar determined that he would ask the Prelate about this.

As Lovar moved forward, he caught the eye of the old man, who turned towards him.

"Sorry my friend, I have no produce for sale today, come back tomorrow and you may have better luck."

Lovar raised his hand in greeting, "Prelate Donemay, my name is Tak Malleus Lovar. I have come on a mission of great urgency and bring grave news of a mutual friend, the Tak Mah Horan."

At the mention of Horan's name the Prelate's demeanour changed. Moving forward he stared intently into Lovar's eyes. The Historian could feel the uncomfortable sensation of his mind opening up to a powerful external presence. He had to shake his head to clear it from his thoughts. Donemay grinned at the Historian and took him by the arm.

"If you wish to talk of Mah Horan then it may better be done indoors...away from idle ears and gossiping tongues, eh?"

With that the Prelate steered Lovar towards his modest cottage. Now that he was closer the Historian



found Donemay to be an intriguing mix of paradox and mystery. He was old, Lovar could see the passage of long years mirrored in his eyes but his grip was strong, his back still straight. There was a fragility about the man though, a stiffness from joints that had worked far too long and muscles that should have found rest many years before. Lovar looked carefully at the man's face and knew that within his long years he would find the answer to all his questions.

The cottage proved to be small but comfortable, cluttered with the trappings of a farming life. Tools and wet weather clothing hung upon the walls, spades and hoes companions with a number of well-crafted paintings, most depicting local landscapes and characters. As Lovar stepped inside he was almost overpowered by the heady smell of aromatic herbs hanging from the rafters in heavy bunches, and piles of vegetables and mushrooms in large woven baskets. In the centre of the kitchen was a table, set with four heavy chairs and a large arrangement of dried flowers. In his old age the Prelate had made a comfortable home for himself.

Donemay motioned for Lovar to sit, and the Historian took a chair farthest from the door. The Prelate busied himself with a pair of mugs and a jug of sweet smelling cider.

"It has been a long time, my young friend, since anybody has come to my door and uttered the name of the Tak Mah Horan. My earnest hope is that you know of him personally, for I may be old but I am not someone who should be trifled with."

In response Lovar pulled the old Tak's insignia from his vest pocket and handed it to the Prelate. Donemay's forehead creased as he recognised the ornate medallion for who it belonged to. Weighing it in his hand he turned from the Historian and placed it within his robes.

"Mah Horan was one of my teachers and a good friend," continued Lovar, "and it is because of him that I find myself now talking with someone who the Guild has always maintained was dead."

Donemay smiled, "Perhaps there might be a time when I will tell you that story, but I am not one for small talk. What is your mission, and what news do you have of Mah Horan?"

With mug in hand Lovar began his tale. He explained the desperation of the battle at Maenum and the decision of the Synod to send the Dwarvendim to Stoneholme. Quickly he outlined his concerns at the sending of a possible *Shardarim* to restore the Tellandra and the outcome of his letters to the Guild. At a number of points the Prelate interrupted Lovar with questions and observances of his own. He seemed particularly interested in anything regarding the Dwarvendim and his background.

The worst news Lovar had to leave till the end. With the disaster at Baellum and the loss of Mah Horan the Prelate was visibly shaken. It was a mood underlined by the loud rolling drumbeat of thunder outside.

The Prelate stood up and paced his small kitchen. "You bring with you grave news indeed. The death of Mah Horan is a great personal loss, he was my greatest friend and one of the few Historians who still maintained an open mind regarding the world outside of the Guild. This mission to restore the Tellandra is of much greater import however. I fear that in this circumstance the Synod may have made a serious error."

Lovar rose from his chair, he had questions that needed to be answered. "Mah Horan had followed me from Maenum. It was because of this that he was caught in the storm, and it was his final words that have led me to your door. What do you know about the mission to find the Tellandra that places the Guild in such crisis? Why was he so concerned?"

Donemay took a few deep breaths and considered Lovar. "You are a loyal and disciplined member of the Guild?"

"Yes," replied Lovar.

"Then I need not tell you that what we are about to discuss remains between us?"

"Yes."

"Then you'd better sit down. This is going to take a while."

The Prelate returned to his seat and a frown creased his brow, Lovar could see on his face old memories being dredged back to the surface. Some of them did not appear to be happy ones. When he began it was with another question.

"Lovar, what is the one thing the Guild desires above all else?"

For the Historian this was an easy question to answer, from his earliest days as a novice he had the answer drilled into him. "To acquire a full understanding of EarthMagic and to use its power for the common good."

The Prelate grimaced at his reply, "I thought that might be your answer. Listen carefully Tak. If you are to understand anything that I am about to say then you must believe that the main desire of the Guild since its creation has been the acquisition of *power*."



Lovar jumped to his feet, a protest upon his lips, but a raised hand from the Prelate silenced him before he could speak.

"I understand your need to defend the Guild but remember something, I was there, I know what we did, and I know why. Forget everything you have been taught and listen!"

The old Prelate sat quietly for a moment. Lovar could see him working hard within his memories, trying to make a complex story as straightforward as possible.

"When the Dwarvendim were conquered by Kalborea we found a treasure trove of artefacts and scrolls hidden within their Temples. None of us knew what they were for, or how they were to be used. All we knew was that somewhere within those Dwarvendim writings lay the secret to EarthMagic, and the power to make Kalborea the greatest nation of all. In those days a small number of us were given the job of interrogating the Dwarvendim LoreMasters and trying to decipher their encrypted records. We had captured all the LoreMasters at the Battle of Borkraag'Nol, and were sure that it would only be a matter of time before we would get everything that was necessary from them, by either interrogation or torment."

"They proved to be stubborn however in their refusal to give over any hint of how they had managed to harness the power of EarthMagic. But we had their records and most of their artefacts. It was felt that it would only be a matter of time before we would have their power in our hands."

"Such was the importance given to the acquisition of this power that the LoreMages, as we now called ourselves, were given great authority. Over the years this power has grown as the people of Kalborea have been led to believe our mastery of EarthMagic has also grown."

"I will tell you now that such mastery has never been achieved. The men we thought were the Dwarvendim LoreMasters proved to be impostors, placed to keep us looking in the wrong places, delving in the wrong directions. Even now it is possible that some of the LoreMasters still live amongst us, but we have never been able to root them out. Their encrypted records have never been deciphered, and as such the sum power of the LoreMages resides in a few artefacts that we have been able to turn to our use."

"It is a hard thing to say, but the Guild had missed the point of EarthMagic from the very beginning. I only realised what was wrong after fifty years of hard work and then, when I finally approached the other members of the Synod with my findings, I was retired without explanation. They were by then more interested in maintaining the power they had built, rather than seeing that our quest for mastery of EarthMagic had been completely flawed."

"You see Lovar, EarthMagic is a life-force, not of the beasts of the earth nor of the forests. It resides deep within the Earth and flows from the very stone of the land itself. You cannot harness it, you can only guide it in the direction you want. To properly master it you must have an affinity with stone; you must understand its form, and its strength, if you are to have any chance of being able to use it. The Dwarvendim have this affinity, we do not. It is as simple and as tragic as that."

The Prelate let his words fade into silence before he continued.

"It was there for all to see from the very beginning we just chose not to look. Even when it was demonstrated before my very eyes I failed to see it for what it was. I believe that we will all soon pay dearly for that oversight."

Donemay moved in his chair, trying to find comfort for old bones.

"I remember exactly the circumstances of that demonstration of true power Lovar, just as if it had occurred yesterday. The Dwarvendim had completed the Barrier Wall at Maenum, and on the evening that the final stones were being laid they approached the camp commander to hold a ceremony upon its battlements. They said at the time it was to dedicate the structure to those that had died in its construction. We allowed it to go ahead and I was there when the ceremony was conducted. Not until later did we realise the true intent of the ritual."

"It was a crystal clear night, the moons were high above and their light flooded the fortress. I was upon the High Watchtower and watched as the Dwarvendim went through an elaborate round of speeches and songweaving. As much as anyone else I was spellbound by the grace and beauty of it, and I must say that it came as a complete surprise to me when the first sun began to rise in the east. Somehow the night had passed as if I had been held within a trance. It was then that it happened. At the end of a long series of chants and intonations an old man was brought forward, holding within his closed fist a small glowing piece of blue stone. It shone brightly in the pre-dawn and I immediately shouted down to the guards to retrieve it from him. Before they could get within ten paces he placed the stone upon the wall and it quickly melded into it. From within the wall the same blue light began to glow, spreading outwards from the old man's hand



and deep down into the foundations of the fortress. I swear Lovar you could hear the Barrier Wall settling down into the earth like it was being fused with the very bedrock itself. By the time the guards got to where the old man had been standing he was gone, and no amount of torment gave up any further information about him, or his powers."

Again the Prelate paused, but then continued with a firmness in his voice that belied his age.

"The point of this story is that even though the Tellandra had been lost to the Dwarvendim they still had the ability to charge the wall with EarthMagic, to harness a level of power that far exceeded in that one instant all the EarthMagic we have been able to gather in the last hundred years. That energy still holds the wall together today even as it is being assailed by the Horde. We have not come close to that sort of control, even though we have tried."

The Prelate stopped for a moment and looked deep in thought. When he again began to speak his voice was still firm but edged with fatigue and frustration.

"To cut a very long story short Lovar, it is accurate to say that our attempts to harness the EarthMagic have proved futile. But there is a greater issue at hand, one that must be brought to the attention of the Synod. I fear that your letter has stirred old memories within its members, and they may now be realising the folly of their actions. In this matter your fears are well founded Historian. If the Dwarvendim does manage to restore the pillar of stonewood then the LoreMages' Guild will fall."

Given the gravity of the Prelate's words Lovar's mind raced with questions and a need to understand. The Prelate had to finish his story though. He motioned the Historian to silence and continued.

"We have used EarthMagic as we were able for generations Lovar, but in the process we have corrupted its essence. Once it glowed blue as the morning sky, now it is felt as only a pale reflection of its former potency, and even in my time was shifting away, trying to evade any further use. The EarthMagic itself does not want us to control it and as soon as our link is broken, it will flee from our hands. If the Tellandra is restored its power will shift to the Dwarvendim LoreMasters and their control will be returned. Wherever they are, they will feel the shift and easily be able to take it back for themselves. If this happens then we will have nothing but the ashes of our work to sift through, no power or purpose. We will be spent."

Lovar moved uncomfortably in his seat. He knew there were dangers in the course the Synod had taken, but such consequences were unseen and unwelcome. The worst had still to be told though.

"Now we must come to the consequences of losing control of the EarthMagic." Here the Prelate became hard, there was an edge to his voice that made Lovar tense up.

"Two generations ago there grew to power a Prelate by the name of Vo'rell. He was a skilled manipulator of the power we had, and over time gained great favour within the Synod. At the height of his career he proclaimed that he had made a great discovery, one that shook the foundations of the Guild."

"Need it be said that our greatest enemy is the Hordim. Through our entire history they have been our most persistent bane and nemesis. Vo'rell declared that he had found the process by which the Hordim had been created by the ancients and, if given sufficient time, he could determine how to unmake them. This proclamation sent shockwaves through the Guild. The Synod immediately gave him the resources he required, but many of us were not convinced he knew what he was doing. Caution was urged, however the prize of removing the Hordim from Arborell once and for all was too great a temptation."

"For years Vo'rell and his followers attempted the unmaking of the Hordim, but they were children playing with a power they truly did not understand. It was only when Vo'rell was found dead, torn to pieces in his workroom, that the true nature of his experimentation became apparent."

"Rather than trying to find a way to unmake the Hordim he had been instead on the cusp of developing a weapon, one so terrible that in the end even Vo'rell could not control it. He had been creating creatures of his own you see, ravaging monsters garnered from the depths of Hordim mythology. They were creatures that would instil terror into the minds of their victims, and which harboured a remorseless need to kill without mercy or hesitation."

"Consider this, he had been experimenting for years but had never been able to succeed. Instead he had created one failed creature after the next, and each, when it was determined to be worthless to his cause, had been bound by EarthMagic to some underground cavern. He left no records of where they were imprisoned, nor any hint of how many may have been created. All we know is that he named them 'Shadows' and felt content to let them fester in their prison, unknown to the rest of the world."

"These Shadows Lovar, are tortured creatures of darkness. Not wholly real they exist upon the boundaries of the spectral world as mist and vapours that can kill as effortlessly as any Dragon. We have little with

which to defend ourselves against them nor any way to control them if they ever break free. All we could do was shackle them deeper within their nameless prison and hope they faded from our world."

"Now Lovar, the Synod has sent a *Shardarim* to restore the Tellandra. Desperation to hold Maenum has driven them to try and harness the full power of EarthMagic, but as has been proven so many times before, we do not have the ability to do so. The Dwarvendim are unaware of the existence of the Shadows and will be ignorant of the threat they pose to every living being in the world. If your man Vesh is successful then the shackles that hold the Shadows will be released. Power will shift to the LoreMasters and we will have no further hold upon them. It will not be long before they emerge from their prison, and then we will all be prey to their malevolence. It cannot be allowed to happen."

Lovar sat aghast as he listened to the story that had unfolded. His mind was now filled with the myriad consequences of the Guild's folly, however there was no time left to waste on recrimination.

"Prelate, what must we do to avoid such a disaster?"

Donemay sat quietly for a moment then looked at the Historian earnestly. When he spoke it was with a voice as heavy as the rain-charged air outside.

"In all truth it may already be too late. If however you wish to do something then only the resources of the Guild can help. Travel to Hel'garad Lovar, make the Synod see the folly of their course and remind them of the Shadows. It is better that Maenum falls and we rely on the power of our armies to throw back the Hordim, than have to deal with a threat such as the Shadows. Stop the Dwarvendim from reaching Stoneholme, it is the only chance we have."

"But how do I reach Hel'garad? It is at least a week's travel away, too far to reach quickly. It would take a miracle to get there before the Dwarvendim enters Stoneholme."

Donemay rubbed his face and considered the Historian. He looked like he was sizing him up for a new set of clothes.

"Can you ride a horse Lovar?"

"Yes Prelate, and quite well too," replied the Historian.

"Well then there may be a chance after all!"

Jumping to his feet the Prelate ran to a large chest that sat squarely in the northern corner of the cottage. Throwing open its brass strapped lid he began rummaging through its contents. Somewhere near the bottom he found what he was looking for. It was a small, palm-sized amulet, gold in colour with a large green gem set at its centre.

"With this *Sharyah* Lovar we may have the miracle we require! Quickly now, we will need to be outside if we are to set our next course!"

Without another word he rushed through the door and then disappeared into a small shed that was nestled in behind the cottage. Again Lovar heard the sounds of a search, the Prelate looking for something long buried within its gloomy depths.

Left to himself for the moment, Lovar considered the looming storm. Before him great towers and spires of cloud billowed up. Brilliant white at their pinnacles, they trailed a blanket of rain beneath them, forked blasts of lightning already attacking the ground below.

With a shout of triumph the Prelate appeared again from his shed. He was holding a harness, but it was not for any animal Lovar had ever seen.

"Do you love the Guild Lovar?" His voice was filled with urgency.

"It is my life and duty Prelate. Ask and I will do whatever it takes to save it from itself."

"Good, because you are about to go on the ride of your life."



## Riding the Kreal

Holding up the amulet before him, the old Prelate began to chant. The intonation was unknown to the Historian, harsh and guttural it wafted onto the breeze and was soon lost in the rumble of the approaching storm. The Prelate stood tall and energised, suddenly a broad grin grew upon his face.

"When you get to Hel'garad my friend, you'll find more than a few raised eyebrows. By the Fates I'd give anything to be there."

Lovar moved towards the Prelate, "Why not come? Surely we can both go."

The Prelate shook his head. "Believe me, I am too old for this now, anyway your steed will only carry one. And here he comes!"

Pointing directly at the looming stormfront, the Prelate could barely contain his excitement. Lovar peered into the clouds and at first could see nothing. But then a movement caught his eye, it was wings flapping against the bright background of the cloud peaks. When he realised what it was his blood ran cold.

"A Kreal? You expect me to ride a Kreal to Hel'garad?"

The Prelate's grin grew somehow wider, he held the amulet above his head as the wind blew his loose clothing tight about his body.

"Well I said it was going to be the ride of your life. But don't worry, this Hordim *Sharyah* will give you complete control over the beast as long as you have it in your possession."

Dubiously Lovar watched as the great reptile approached. He had never seen one, only heard of their ferocious nature and their ability to kill with long razor-sharp talons. How could he ride such a creature, let alone direct it to Hel'garad? In his thoughts he had a vision of himself dangling from its reptilian claws. It took a moment to shake that image from his mind.

Closer the Kreal flew, its form silhouetted against the darkening sky. It was a huge flying reptile. Not as big as a Dragon, it had been determined that they were not related to those great serpents, but their long slender bodies and wide, leathery wings gave them the look of such creatures. It was only as the reptile settled to earth in front of the cottage that Lovar could see its head. There was a vacant look in its eyes, but its teeth protruded like knives from its jaw and two long horns extended backwards from its head. It was a fearsome creature.

Donemay immediately ran towards the beast and began throwing the harness over its broad back. As he tightened its strapping he rambled off a series of directions.

"All right Lovar here is a quick course in controlling a Kreal. They can be bent to any direction by pulling the reins from left to right, as you might with a horse, but be mindful of the fact that you are operating in three dimensions. To pull upon the reins together will make the Kreal climb, to pull to one side, and spur the beast's side will make it descend in that direction. To land you must spur it in both sides together. The beast will do most of the work, you need only let it know where you want it to go."

As Donemay finished a great blast of lightning hit the ground not a league to the north. Within seconds a resounding clap of thunder jarred the pair and made even the Kreal wince. There could be no further delay.

The Prelate pushed Lovar onto the creature's back. The Historian sat upon its broad saddle and took a deep breath as Donemay handed him the amulet. "Ride for Hel'garad. Go to the Synod and convince them of the need to stop the Dwarvendim. If you cannot reach Hel'garad in time look to the *emurion* for our salvation. In the hands of a true *Shardarim* the stonewood sword is our only defence. Do not let it come to that!"

Thunder rolled across the flats of Chemblain as Donemay struggled to keep standing. The Prelate caught his breath and shouted into the wind for the last time.

"Remember Lovar, the Kreal will only be under your control whilst you hold the *Sharyah*. Lose it and the link is broken, then you will find out how vicious these creatures truly are."

Suddenly another blast of lightning rent the sky. A squall line of wind blustered through the hedges, throwing loose debris into swirling eddies. With one final wave the Prelate slapped the beast upon its haunches and it leapt into the air. At first Lovar was caught off guard, grabbing at the reins the Kreal twisted in the wind unsure of the direction its new master wished to take it, but then the Historian regained his composure and pulled the beast up and to the left. For the moment Lovar only wanted to put distance between himself and the storm and in answer to his directions the Kreal began a slow climb southwards.

As the creature gained altitude the world opened up before Lovar. Behind him the storm sat as a wall of rushing violence, a vast dark cliff-face of cloud. Ahead of him the land was still bathed in sunlight and it was



a vista he had some trouble getting used to. Below Lovar could see the Laneslem snaking off to the south-east, Miller's Crossing had disappeared beneath the storm to the north. Das Frontiere would have to be his first point of reference. It should be somewhere ahead.

With each flap of the Kreal's wings the creature rose higher and its speed increased. Carefully Lovar released the pressure he had been applying to the reins and the beast levelled out, the only sound in Lovar's ears the rushing of the wind, and the regular beat of its powerful wings. The Kreal made no attempt to break itself from the power of the *Sharyah*. Caught within its magical bindings the creature remained docile, but it was a wild thing nonetheless. Lovar could feel its powerful muscles straining across its back as it sped through the air and he had no illusion that it would be a fearsome beast if angered. More than the Kreal however, it was the sensation of flight that took his breath away. Never had he travelled at such speed, and as he watched the landscape below he marvelled at how small everything seemed at such great height. It would be an experience he would never forget.

After a time the Historian began to relax, the Kreal kept a steady pace southwards and soon Das Frontiere slipped beneath their speeding shadow. To reach Hel'garad, which was on the outskirts of Das Nephrim to the south, would take the Kreal as least three hours. It would be time enough to reflect on the Prelate's words.

For a while Lovar watched as the ground rolled away beneath them. It was a curious sensation, covering so much distance so quickly. It gave hope to the Historian though, if he could reach the Synod before Vesh completed his mission then surely there was something that could be done. It was his hope and it was all he had. The Prelate's final hurried words on the *emurion* were strange though. He understood the need to reach Hel'garad quickly but he had not heard anyone mention the old artefact for years, and in truth did not know if it still existed. The stonewood sword had been a trophy of the battle for Kal Murda some centuries before, and it had proved a great mystery to the Guild. Its secrets had never been uncovered and it had faded from the memories of the LoreMages because of it. What use it could be was unknown to him but the Prelate was no fool. If it had a part to play in what might lay ahead then Lovar would ensure that it did. With the great creature's wings beating rhythmically about him the Historian settled back in his saddle and was soon lost to his thoughts. He could not know that Fate was about to intervene and wrest the destiny of the Guild from him.

Without warning he was jolted from his contemplation as an arc of light exploded behind the fleeting Kreal, knocking the Historian forward, almost dismounting him from the beast. Glancing back the Historian's blood ran cold, the stormfront he had been fleeing now bearing down upon him. In the midst of his thoughts he had not noticed the approach of another front from the west, and in their combination the Kreal could not fly fast enough to evade them. Quickly Lovar veered eastwards, but the northern front had also spread, sending lines of cloud into the east as well. Before Lovar could alter course he was swallowed up in the storm and flung within its gales like a leaf upon the wind. Desperately the Historian pulled at the harness trying to force the creature to climb higher, his hope to ascend beyond the grasp of the storm. It was a hope that quickly faded.

The Kreal broke from its trance as a huge flash of lightning smashed through its right wing and sent it into a cascading spiral towards the ground. Lovar realised too late that the *Sharyah* had fallen from his grasp when he had been pitched forward. He had no control of the beast.

In that instant Lovar knew that these were his final moments. Spinning within the clouds, his senses pummelled by the onslaught of the storm, he tried to make his peace with the Fates. Disoriented and unable to control the beast he held on to the saddle's edge and hoped that if the storm did not kill him, then the Kreal would make it quick. In the maelstrom all hope had suddenly vanished.

Then he saw the ground. Below him stood a grove of Deodar trees, their wide canopy of sloping limbs spinning upon the ground as he watched them rush up towards him. Quickly he looked at the Kreal and realised that it was dead, its neck broken by the strength of the tempest. If he was going to survive then the trees below were his only chance. In one moment of desperation he threw himself from the spiralling beast, falling through the raging gales of the storm towards the spreading trees below. When he hit the upper limbs of the Deodars he felt a crushing impact upon his shoulder and then rolled uncontrollably through their branches to the ground. In this chaos of breaking timber and flailing limbs his last conscious thought was that he hoped it would not hurt when he hit ground. Then everything went black.



## The Inquisitor's Lament

Lovar awoke to find himself on his back, half submerged in an icy pool of water left by the storm. At first he could not remember where he was or how he might have come to be there. The pain in his shoulder soon reminded him. It took a while but he was able to roll onto his left side and determine where he had fallen. Close at his right hand was the stand of trees that had broken his fall and apparently saved his life. Ahead of him, probably fifty metres to the south lay the crumpled remains of the Kreal. He did not feel in much better shape.

Carefully the Historian checked himself over. Apart from a ringing headache his injuries proved to be a crushed collar bone, broken ribs and a dislocated right shoulder. He knew immediately that this was more than enough to keep him down. The pain was intense, an ache that drummed within his shoulder and chest. It cleared his head though, each small movement a reminder of his fall and of his lucky escape. He could not remain where he was however. Regardless of the pain he knew he had to get upright, too long prostrate upon the saturated ground would kill him as surely as a sword blade in the back. Nearby stood a small tree, and in his hour of need it would have to be the instrument of his salvation. Carefully he edged his way over and was able to place his back against its trunk, pushing himself upright. The effort sent his head spinning and he fought to remain conscious as he recovered from the vertigo. He knew he was not going anywhere quickly, he had to accept that he may very well die out here upon the plains. At least he was sitting up, and with his right arm cradled in his left he surveyed the land about him.

Judging by his position he had fallen somewhere close to Das Nephrim. In a wide arc the landscape spread as gently rolling hills and grassy plains that extended as far as the eye could see. Only the occasional stand of trees broke the sea of green, and apart from the storm, which had now passed and was receding to the south, he was the only thing moving upon the grasslands.

In that moment of calm the Historian sat without moving. He knew his failure had been almost total, but even at such a time of desperation he was still trying to think of some way that he might be able to salvage the situation. In a fog of pain he succeeded only in realising he was thirsty and in need of food. It was then that he found his pack by his side.

Somehow his pack had survived the fall from the Kreal, strapped tightly at his waist. The shoulder straps were gone, torn off with the force of the fall through the trees, but the waist strap had held. From its interior he foraged a few biscuits and a flask of water, and with these in hand settled back to consider the hopelessness of his quest. He was stuck, well and truly stuck. With his injured shoulder and almost no provisions he would have to somehow make it to a main road and then wait for a ride to Das Nephrim. The numbing throb in his shoulder told him that he would be going nowhere until he could set his broken collar bone. He decided that before he could try that on himself he would need to rest and regain some energy.

Before him the storm continued to recede, and in its wake the afternoon suns broke through the overcast and sent shafts of yellow light through the clouds. Upon the green of the plains it was a beautiful sight, one that Lovar did not feel disposed to appreciate. Then it happened.

In that solitary place Lovar felt a change in the air. The wind died and in the calm that followed the atmosphere became charged with a strange energy. Quickly Lovar placed his water flask upon the wet ground and dug his uninjured hand deep into the moist earth. Something was happening to the EarthMagic, he could feel its energy stirring far below. Reaching out with his mind he searched the bedrock for a sense of the life-force below and found it being drawn westwards to Stoneholme. Perspiration trickled across his face as he tried to delve deeper towards the bedrock of the world, and it was then that he found himself in contact with the power of the Earth itself.

In a flash his mind was filled with a rushing parade of images, smells and colour. He saw the fall of Morgen Orncryst and the smashing of the pillar of stonewood. In a frantic kaleidoscope of shape and sound the history of Arborell crashed through his mind and then fell silent. For a second there was nothing, and then he saw a lone figure rise out of darkness and confront a huge Dragon. In a flash of violence the Dragon died and then out of the void came four words, resounding through the ground as an earthquake might ripple from its source. *Naman Tor Varshem Tolluth*. The Tellandra was whole again. Lovar had failed.

To the south the Historian could see in the myriad images flowing from the ground the towers of Hel'garad exploding in flame and blue light, the LoreMages of Kalborea falling as fiery embers to the ground. To the north the walls of Maenum strengthened and the Hordim recoiled as they ran from an EarthMagic born anew. And then, at the edge of the western world Lovar stumbled into a pit of darkness. In



holes too deep to plumb and behind walls of magic that now crumbled away, something dark and sinister smashed its way from its prison. Hate and malevolence flowed from the entity like water from a broken dam and it rushed outwards, its mission to kill and destroy with a ruthless abandon. Too late Lovar pulled his hand from the ground, a wave of energy pounding into his senses, toppling him backwards onto the wet earth. Without any further strength to give he laid still, his mind whirling in a spiral of semi-consciousness. In pain and confusion he writhed upon the grasses and tried to escape his torment, hope now gone, his body spent. It was in this time of despair that the words of his old teacher Mah Horan came back to haunt him. It was curious that he should remember them now but it seemed strangely appropriate. It had been something that had been told to him many years before, and it rang in his ears as clearly as the day it had first been spoken. Horan had called it the Inquisitor's lament and the old Tak's words echoed in Lovar's thoughts as he fell into unconsciousness.

"Lovar", he had said, "We are blessed by providence in that we may record truth and strive to make sense of the world. Great happenings pass before us and we write them down. Great questions are asked and we quest for their answers. But Lovar, when all is said and done we are just bystanders in the world. In the end we change nothing."





## *Aftermath*

*The Tellandra has been restored but the Tak Lovar's part in this tale has not yet ended. Stranded upon the grasslands of Arborell he must now find his way to the ruins of Hel'garad and recover the emurion, a mythical sword of stonewood that may be the only weapon, and the only hope, now available to combat the creatures of shadow. In the second novella in this companion series - Honour amongst Thieves - the Tak Lovar journeys to the smoking towers of Hel'garad, and finds within its broken stone more than just a simple sword. There he uncovers a new destiny and an unforeseen alliance with the Dwarvendim LoreMasters, one necessary to combat the power of the Shadowch.*





## The Chronicles Companion series of Novellas and short Gamebook Adventures

The Chronicles Companion Series is an exciting new addition to the Chronicles of Arborell fantasy gamebook saga. Behind the scenes of great events, and in the progress of epic quests, you will find characters and circumstances that shape their cause and their outcome. In your journeys through Arborell you will meet many characters, for both good and ill, and hear of battles and lost secrets that have made the world the way it is. The Companion Series tells these stories. Some of these tales begin in the forgotten recesses of history, whilst others occur as you journey upon your quest, but all are important to what happens to you as you travel the wilds of Arborell.

Each gamebook adventure will have its own companion books, and each book will uncover a small part of the interwoven story that propels you forward on your own journeys and makes your adventures necessary. Be mindful of one important factor though. Each of these companion stories refers to a world, of places and events, that cannot be fully appreciated without having first read the adventure it accompanies. For "The Inquisitor's Lament" that adventure is the Windhammer gamebook.

The Windhammer fantasy gamebook is the first in the [Chronicles of Arborell](#) gamebook series. It takes you from the strongholds of Maenum to the depths of the ancient labyrinths of Stoneholme, and the lair of the Dragon Windhammer. This interactive fantasy adventure will have, in time, four companion books of which The Inquisitor's Lament is the first. Information on each of the Windhammer companion books can be found below.

### The Inquisitor's Lament

To be a Seeker of Truth can be a lonely and sometimes dangerous profession. For the Tak Malleus Lovar the responsibilities and traditions of the Guild are his life. That is until he finds reason to question their purpose. Upon the frontiers of the known world he uncovers a question that leads to a mystery and a deadly secret. One that propels him southward on a quest to find a man, once thought dead, but now his only hope. Only then can the Tak Lovar stop the folly of the Guild from destroying them all.

### Honour amongst thieves

Jonath Mac couldn't believe his luck. Staked out upon the plains he was sure he was about to die a long and lonely death. Then from nowhere arose a young Dwarvendim who set him free and let him go on his way. Now it is time for revenge. With little more than a hunch and a few coins in his pocket he must track down the most ruthless bandit in all the nations of Arborell and extract a little justice of his own. Little does he realise that in doing so he will be a witness to the fall of Hel'garad and come into possession of one of the greatest treasures in the world, a stonewood sword named *emurion*.

### Kal Murda

It is a time of great danger for the Four Nations of Arborell. The Horde streams in through Maenum Pass and spreads across the plains of Northern Kalborea like a ravaging plague. For the garrison at the small settlement of Kal Murda no warning is given and in their isolation have no chance of retreat. In the blazing light of morning the Horde Army descends upon them and in two days of violent combat the tide of the Seventh Horde War is turned. This is the story of two brothers, the only survivors of the greatest battle in the history of Kalborea, and the aftermath of the destruction of Kal Murda.



## The Last Stone King

The War of Three Nations is almost at an end, the Dwarvendim of the Stone Kingdoms find defeat the bitter aftertaste of years of war and privation. In one last attempt to save his people, Morgen Orncryst the Younger, opens the last of his vaults. Within is the treasure needed to buy his way from the edge of disaster, but instead he finds the instrument of his demise, and the end of the Dwarvendim Stone Kingdoms. Great nations fall and the power of EarthMagic is stolen in this tale of bold intentions and lurking evil.

A Map of Northern Kalborea



A full compilation of maps from the Chronicles of Arborell series can be found at the Chronicles website at <http://www.arborell.com/>