A place with every single Skyrim book in it. A challenge for me to write something every day, to at least get my fingers moving. I will also be doing journals.

Trigger warnings will be at the beginning of every book in the notes. I won't be putting them in the tags because otherwise it would be a block of tags and no one wants that. You'll be warned anyway. If I've forgotten a trigger warning, please tell me!

I don't really care if no one reads this, because it's all lore and stuff. It's just something to document my progress.

Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for blood mention, animal death, and animal testing.
Ever proud and boastful, Oblivion’s Mad Prince stood one day fifth day of mid year among the frigid peaks of Skyrim, and beckoned forth Hircine for parlay. The Huntsman God materialised, for this was his day, and the boldness of Sheogorath intrigued him.

Wry without equal, Sheogorath holds in his realm giggling loons, flamboyant auteurs, and craven mutilators. The Mad Prince will ply profitless bargains and promote senseless bloodshed for nothing more than the joy of another’s confusion, tragedy, or rage. So it was that Sheogorath had set himself a stage on which to play himself as rival to Hircine.

Without haste, the coy Prince proffered his contest; each Prince was to groom a beast to meet at this place again, three years to the hour, and do fatal battle. Expressionless behind his fearsome countenance, Hircine agreed, and with naught but dusting of snow in the drift, the Princes were gone to their realms.

Confident, but knowing Sheogorath for a trickster, Hircine secretly bred an abomination in his realm. An ancient Daedroth he summoned, and imbued it with the foul curse of lycanthropy. Of pitch heart and jagged fang, the unspeakable horror had no peer, even among the great hunters of Hircine’s sphere.

In the third year, on the given day, Hircine returned, where Sheogorath leaned, cross-legged on a stone, whistling with idle patience. The Prince of the Hunt struck his spear to the ground, bringing forth his unnatural, snarling behemoth. Doffing his cap, sly as ever, Sheogorath stood and stepped aside to reveal a tiny, colourful bird perched atop the stone. Demurely it chirped in the bristling gusts, scarcely audible.

In a twisted, springing heap, the Daedroth was upon the stone, leaving only rubble where the stone had been. Thinking itself victorious, the monster’s bloodied maw curled into a mock grin, when a subdued song drifted in the crisp air. The tiny bird lightly hopped along the snout of the furious Daedroth. Sheogorath looked on, quietly mirthful, as the diminutive creature picked at a bit of detritus caught in scaled betwixt the fiery eyes of teh larger beast. With howling fury, the were-thing blinded itself trying to pluck away the nuisance. And so it continued for hours, Hircine looking on in shame while his finest beast gradually destroyed itself in pursuit of the seemingly oblivious bird, all the while chirping a mournful tune to the lonesome range.

Livid, but beaten, Hircine burned the ragged corpse and returned to his realm, swearing in forgotten tongues. His curses still hang in those peaks, and no wayfarer tarries in fear of his wrathful aspect in those obscured heights.

Turning on his heel, Sheogorath beckoned the minuscule songbird to perch atop his shoulder, and strolled down the mountain, making for the warm breezes and vibrant sunsets of the Abecean coast, whistling in tune with the tiniest champion in Tamriel.
Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for skinning, cannibalism, genocide, psychological torture, abandonment, and death.

16 Accords of Madness, v. IX

Vaermina’s Tale

Darius Shano found himself running as fast as he could.

He had no idea what he was running from or towards, but he didn’t care. The desire saturated his mind—there was nothing in the world except flight. He looked around for landmarks, anything to place himself or to use as a target, but to no avail—the featureless grasslands through which he was sprinting extended as far as the eye could see. “Just have to keep running,” he thought to himself. “I have to run as fast as I can.” On and on he ran, with no end in sight or in mind...

Standing over Darius Shano while he lay quietly in his bed were his mistress, Vaermina the Dreamweaver, and the Madgod Sheogorath. Vaermina looked down with pride at this disciple of hers, and was boastful of her little jewel.

“Such potential in this one! Through dreams of inspiration, I have nurtured literary talent in fruition, and now he stands in acclaim as an emerged bard and poet! He will gain much favour before I tire of him.” Sheogorath, too, gazed at the young Breton artist and saw that he was indeed famous among the other mortals.

“Hmmm,” mused Sheogorath, “but how many are there that hate this mortal that you have built? It is the hatred of the mortals that confirm greatness, and not their love. Surely you can accomplish this as well?”

Vaermina’s eyes narrowed. “Yes, the mortals are indeed often foolish and petty, and it is true that many of their bold have been despised. Do not worry, mad one, for I have the power to achieve many forms of hatred in this one, hatred among them.”

“Perhaps, Dreamweaver, it would be amusing to show who has this power? Inspire foolish, arrogant hatred of this mortal for ten years, and then I will do the same. We will see who’s talents are most efficient, free of aid or interference from any of the Daedra.”

At this, she relaxed into confident pleasure. “The Madgod is indeed powerful, but this task is suited to my skill. The mortals are repulsed by madness, but rarely think it worthy of hate. I shall take pleasure in revealing this to you, as I bring the more subtle horrors out of this mortal’s consciousness.”

And so, in the 19th year of his life, the dreams Darius Shano had been experiencing began to change. Fear had always been part of the night for him, but now there was something else. A darkness began to creep into his slumber, a darkness that sucked away all feeling and colour, leaving only emptiness behind. When this happened, he opened his mouth to scream, but found that
the darkness had taken his voice as well. All he had was the terror and the void, and each night they filled him with a new understanding of death. Yet, when he woke, he had no fear, for he had faith that his Lady had a purpose.

Indeed, one night Vaermina herself emerged from the void. She leaned in close to whisper into his ear.

“Watch carefully, my beloved!” With that, she pulled the void away, and for hours each night she would reveal to Darius the most horrible perversions of nature. Men being skinned and eaten alive by other men, unimaginable beasts of many limbs and mouths, entire populations being burned—their screams filled his every evening. In time, these visions gnawed at his soul, and his work began to take on the character of his nightmares. The images revealed to him every night were reproduced on the page, and the terrible cruelty and hollow vice that his work both revolted and fascinated the public. They revealed in their disgust over every detail. There were those who opening enjoyed his shocking material, and his popularity among some only fed the hatred of those who found him abhorrent. This continued for several years, while the infamy of Darius grew steadily. Then, in his 29th year, without warning, the dreams and nightmares ceased.

Darius felt weight lifted, as he no longer endured the nightly tortures, but was confused. “What have I done to displease my Mistress?” he wondered aloud. “Why has she abandoned me?” Vaermina never answered his prayers. No one ever answered, and the restless dreams faded away to leave Darius in long, deep sleeps.

Interest in the works of Darius Shano waned. His prose became stale and his ideas failed to provoke the shock and outrage they once had. As the memory of his notoriety and of his terrible dreams began to fade, the questions that raced in his mind eventually produced resentment against Vaermina, his former mistress. Resentment grew into hatred, from hatred came ridicule, and over time ridicule became disbelief. Slowly it became obvious—Vaermina had never spoken to him at all; his dreams were simply the product of a sick mind that had righted itself. He had become deceived by his own subconscious, and the anger and shame overwhelmed him. The man who once conversed with a deity drifted steadily into heresy.

In time, all of the bitterness, doubt, and sacrilege focused in Darius a creative philosophy that was threaded throughout all of his subsequent work. He challenged the Gods themselves, as well as the infantile public and their corrupt state for worshipping them. He mocked them all with perverse caricatures, sparing no one and giving no quarter. He challenged the Gods in public to strike him down if they existed, and ridiculed them when no such comeuppance was delivered. To all of this, people reacted with outrage far greater than they had shown his previous work. His earlier career had offended only sensibilities, but now he was striking directly at the heart of the people.

His body of work grew in size and intensity. Temples, nobles, and commoners were all targets of his scorn. Finally, at age 39, Darius wrote a piece entitled “The Noblest Fool”, ridiculing The Emperor God Tiber Septim for integrating into the pathetic Nine Divines cult. The local King of Daenia, who had been humiliated by this upstart in the past, saw his chance—for his sacrilege against the Empire, Darius Shano was executed, with a ceremonial blade, in front of a cheering crowd of hundreds. His last, bitter words were gurgled through a mouthful of his own blood.

20 years after their wager was first placed, Vaermina and Sheogorath met over Darius Shano’s headless corpse. The Dreamweaver had been eager for this meeting; she had been waiting for years to confront the Daedric Prince over his lack of action.

“I have been deceived by you, Sheogorath! I performed my half of the bargain, but during your ten years you never contacted the mortal once. He owes none of his greatness to you or your talent or
“Nonsense,” croaked the Madgod. “I was with him all along! When your time ended and mine began, your whispers in his ear were replaced with silence. I severed his link to that from which he found the most comfort and meaning, and withheld the very attention the creature so desperately craved. Without his mistress, this man’s character could ripen under resentment and hatred. Now his bitterness is total and, overcome by a madness fuelled by his rage, he feeds me in my realm as an eternal servant.”

Sheogorath turned and spoke to the empty space by his side.

“And thus did Sheogorath teach Vaermina that without madness, there are no dreams, and no creation. Vaermina will never forget this lesson.
Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for death, body mutilation, beheading, and blood mention.

16 Accords of Madness, v. XII

Malacath’s Tale

In the days before Orsinium’s founding, the spurned Orc-folk were subjected to ostracism and persecution even more numerous and harsh than their progeny are accustomed to in our own age. So it was that many of the Orsimer travelled, enforcing what borders they could for the proliferation of their own people. Many of these champions are spoken yet today, among them the Cursed Legion, Gromma the Hairless, and the noble Emmeg Gro-Kayra. This latter crusader would have certainly raised to legendary status throughout Tamriel, had he not been subject to the attention of certain Daedric Princes.

Emmeg Gro-Kayra was the bastard son of a young maiden who was killed in childbirth. He was raised by the shaman of his tribe, the Grilikamaug in the peaks of what we now call Normar Heights. Late in his fifteenth year, Emmeg forged by hand an ornate suit of scaled armour, a rise of ascension among the tribe. On a blustery day, he pounded the final rivet, and draping a heavy cloak over the bulky mantle, Emmeg set out from his village for the last time. Word of his exploits always returned home, whether defending merchant caravans from brigands or liberating enslaved beast folk. News of the noble Orc crusader began to even grace the lips of Bretons, often with a tinge of fear.

Less than two years after ascending to maturity, Emmeg Gro-Kayra was making camp when a thin voice called out from the thickening night. He was surprised to hear the language of his people spoken by a tongue that obviously didn’t belong to an Orc.

“Lord Kayra,” said the voice, “tales of your deeds have crossed the lips of many, and have reached my ears.” Peering into the murk, Emmeg made out the silhouette of a cloaked figure, made wavy and ephemeral by the hazy campfire. From the voice alone he had thought the interloper an old hag, but now he decided he was in the presence of slight and lanky build, though he could discern no further detail.

“Perhaps,” the wary Orc began, “but I seek no glory. Who are you?”

Ignoring the question, the stranger continued, “Despite that, Orsimer, glory finds you, and I bear a gift worthy of it.” The visitor’s cloak parted slightly, revealing nothing but faintly glinting buttons in the pale moonlight, and a bundle was withdrawn and tossed to the side of the fire between the two. Emmeg cautiously removed the rags in which the object was swathed, and was dazzled to discover the item to be a wide, curved blade with an ornately decorated handle. The weapon was heft, and Emmeg realised on brandishing it that the elaborate pommel disguised the more practical purpose of balancing the considerable weight of the blade itself. It was nothing much to look at in its present condition, thought the Orc, but once the tarnish was cleaned away and a few missing jewels replaced, it would indeed be a blade worthy of a champion ten times his own worth.
“Her name is Neb-Crescen,” spoke the thin stranger, seeing the appreciation lighting Gro-Kayra’s face. “I got her for a horse and a secret in warmer climes, but in my old age I’d be lucky to even lift such a weapon. It’s only proper that I pass her on to one such as yourself. To possess her is to change your life, forever.” Overcoming his initial infatuation with the arc of honed steel, Emmeg turned his attention back to the vehicle.

“Your words are fine, old man,” Emmeg said, not masking his suspicion, “but I’m no fool. You traded for this blade once, and you’ll trade for it again tonight. What is it that you want?” The stranger’s shoulders slumped, and Emmeg was glad to unveil the true purpose of this twilight visit. He sat with him a while, eventually offering a stack of furs, warm food, and a handful of coins in exchange for the exotic weapon. By morning, the stranger was gone.

In the week following Emmeg’s encounter with the stranger, Neb-Crescen had not left its scabbard. He had encountered no enemy in the woods, and his meals consisted of fowl and small game caught with bow and arrow. The peace suited him fine, but on the seventh morning, while fog still crept between the low-hanging boughs, Emmeg’s ears pricked up at the telltale crunch of a nearby footfall in the dense snow and forest debris.

Emmeg’s nostrils flared, but he was upwind. Being unable to see or smell his guest, and knowing that the breeze carried his scent in that direction, Emmeg’s guard was up, and he cautiously drew Neb-Crescen from its sheath. Emmeg himself was not entirely sure of all that happened next.

The first moment of conscious memory in Emmeg Gro-Kayra’s mind after drawing Neb-Crescen was the image of the curved blade sweeping in the air in front of him, spattering blood over the virginal powder coating the forest floor. The second memory was a feeling of frenzied bloodlust creeping over him, but it was then that he saw for the first time his victim, an Orc woman perhaps a few years younger than himself, her body a canvas of grisly wounds, enough to kill a strong man ten times over.

Emmeg’s disgust overwhelmed the madness that had overtaken him, and with all his will enlisted, he released Neb-Crescen’s from his grip and let the blade sail. With a discordant ringing it spun through the air and was buried in the snowdrift. Emmeg fled the scene in shame and horror, drawing the hood of his cloak up to hide himself from the judging eyes of the rising sun.

The scene where Emmeg Gro-Kayra had murdered one of his own kind was a macabre one. Below the neck, the body was flayed and mutilated almost beyond recognition, but the untouched face was frozen in a permanent expression of abject terror.

It was here that Sheogorath performed certain rites that summoned Malacath, and the two Daedric Lords held court in the presence of the disfigured corpse.

“Why show me this, Mad One?” began Malacath, once he recovered from his initial, wordless outrage. “Do you take such pleasure in watching me grieve the murder of my own children?” His guttural voice rumbled, and the patron of the Orsimer looked upon his counterpart with accusing eyes.

“By birth, she was yours, brother outcast,” began Sheogorath, solemn in aspect and demeanour. “But she was a daughter of mine by her own habits. My mourning here is no less than your own, my outrage no less great.”

“I am to so sure,” grumbled Malacath, “but rest assured that vengeance for this crime is mine to reap. I expect no contest from you. Stand aside.” As the fearsome Prince began to push past him, Lord Sheogorath spoke again.
“I have no intention of standing between you and vengeance. In fact, I mean to help you. I have servants in this wilderness, and can tell you just where to find own mutual foe. I ask only that you use a weapon of my choosing. Wound the criminal with my blade, and banish him to my plane, where I can exact my own punishment. The rights of honour-killing here belong to you.”

With that, Malacath agreed, took the wide blade from Sheogorath, and was gone.

Malacath materialised in the path of the murderer, the cloaked figure obscured through a blizzard haze. Bellowing a curse so foul as to wilt the surrounding trees, the blade was drawn and Malacath crossed the distance more quickly than a wild fox. Frothing with rage, he swung the blade in a smooth arc which lopped the head of his foe cleanly off, then plunged the blade up to its hilt in his chest, choking off the spurts of blood into a steady, growing stain of red bubbling from beneath the scaled armour and heavy cloak.

Panting from the unexpected immediacy and fury of his own kill, Malacath rested on one knee as the body before him collapsed heavily backwards and the head landed roughly upon a broad, flat stone. The next sound broke the silence like a bolt.

“I - I’m sorry,” sputtered the voice of Emmeg Gro-Kayra. Malacath’s eyes went wide as he looked upon the severed head, seeping blood from its wound, but somehow kept alive. Its eyes wavered around wildly, trying to focus on the aspect of Malacath before it. The once-proud eyes of the champion were choked with tears of grief, pain, and confused recognition.

To his horror, Malacath recognised that only now that the man he had killed was not only one of his Orsimer children, but very literally a son he had blessed an Orc maiden with years hence. For achingly long moments the two looked upon each other, despondent and shocked.

Then, silent as cold steel, Sheogorath strode into the clearing. He heft Emmeg Gro-Kayra’s disembodied head and bundled it into a small, grey sack. Sheogorath reclaimed Neb-Crescen from the corpse and turned to walk away. Malacath began to stand, but kneeled again, knowing he had irreversibly damned his own offspring to the realm of Sheogorath, and mourned his failure as the sound of his son’s hoarse pleas faded into the frozen horizon.
Morning Star
Book One of 2920
The Last Year of the First Era
by Carlovac Townway

1 Morning Star, 2920
Mournhold, Morrowind

Almalexia lay in her bed of fur, dreaming. Not until the sun burned through her window, infusing the light wood and flesh colours of her chambers in a milky glow did she open her eyes. It was quiet and serene, a stunning reverse of the flavour of her dreams, so full of blood and celebration. For a few moments, she simply stared at the ceiling, trying to sort through her visions.

In the courtyard of her palace was a boiling pool which steamed in the coolness of the winter morning. At the wave of her hand, it cleared and she saw the face and form of her lover Vivec in his study in the north. She did not want to speak right away: he looked so handsome in his dark red robes, writing his poetry as he did every morning.

“Vivec,” she said, and he raised his head in a smile, looking at her face across thousands of miles. “I have seen a vision of the end of the war.”

“After eighty years, I don’t think anyone can imagine an end,” said Vivec with a smile, but he grew serious, trusting Almalexia’s prophecies. “Who will win? Morrowind or the Cyrodiilic Empire?”

“Without Sotha Sil in Morrowind, we will lose,” she replied.

“My intelligence tells me the Empire will strike us to the north in early springtime, by First Seed at the latest. Could you go to Artaeum and convince him to return?”

“I’ll leave tomorrow,” she said, simply.

4 Morning Star, 2920
Gideon, Black Marsh

The Empress paced around her cell. Wintertide gave her wasteful energy, while in the summer she would merely sit by her window and be grateful for each breath of stale swamp air that came to cool her. Across the room, her unfinished tapestry of a dance at the Imperial Court seemed to mock her. She ripped it from its frame, tearing the pieces apart as they drifted to the floor.

Then she laughed at her own useless gesture of defiance. She would have plenty of time to repair it and craft a hundred more. The Emperor had locked her up in Castle Giovesse seven years ago, and
would likely keep her here until either he or she died.

With a sigh, she pulled the cord to call her knight, Zuuk. He appeared at the door within minutes, fully uniformed as befitted an Imperial Guard. Most of the native Korthringi tribesmen of Black Marsh preferred to go about naked, but Zuuk had taken a positive delight to fashion. His silver, reflective skin was scarcely visible, only on his face, neck, and hands.

“Your Imperial Highness,” he said with a bow.

“Zuuk,” said Emperor Tavia. “I’m bored. Let’s discuss methods of assassinating my husband today.”

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**14 Morning Star, 2920**  
**The Imperial City, Cyrodiil**

The chimes proclaiming South Wind’s Prayer echoed through the wide boulevards and gardens of the Imperial City, calling all to their temples. The Emperor Reman III always attended a service at the Temple of the One, while his son and heir Prince Juilek found it more political to attend a service at a different temple for each religious holiday. This year, it was at the cathedral Benevolence of Mara.

The Benevolence’s service was mercifully short, but it was not until well after noon that the Emperor was able to return to the palace. By then, the arena combatants were impatiently waiting for the start of the ceremony. The crowd was far less restless, as the Potentate Versidue-Shaie had arranged for a demonstration from a troupe of Khajiiti acrobats.

“Your religion is so much more convenient than mine,” said the Emperor to the Potentate by way of apology. “What is the first game?”

“A one-on-one battle between two able warriors,” said the Potentate, his scaly skin catching the sun as he rose. “Armed befitting their culture.”

“Sounds good,” said the Emperor and clapped his hands together. “Let the sport commence!”

As soon as he saw the two warriors enter the arena to the roar of the crowd, Emperor Reman III remembered that he had agreed to this several months before and forgotten about it. One combatant was the Potentate’s son, Savirien-Chorak, a glistening ivory-yellow eel, gripping his katana and wakizashi with his thin, deceptively weak looking arms. The other was the Emperor’s son, Prince Juilek, in Ebony armour with a savage Orcish helm, shield, and longsword at his side.

“This will be fascinating to watch,” hissed the Potentate, a wide grin across his narrow face. “I don’t know if I’ve even seen a Cyrodiil fight an Akavir like this. Usually it’s army against army. At least we can settle which philosophy is better—to create armour to combat swords as your people do, or to create swords to combat armour as mine do.”

No one in the crowd, aside from a few scattered Akaviri counsellors and the Potentate himself wanted Savirien-Chorak to win, but there was a collective intake of breath at the site of his graceful movements. His sword seemed to be part of him, a tail coming from his arm to match the one behind him. It was a trick of counterbalance, allowing the young serpent man to roll up into a circle and spin into the centre of the ring in offensive position. The Prince had to plod forward the less impressive traditional way.

As they sprang at each other, the crowd bellowed in delight. The Akaviri was like a moon in orbit
around the Prince, effortlessly springing over his shoulder to attempt a blow from behind, but the Prince whirled around quickly to block with his shield. His counter-strike met only air as his foe fell flat to the ground and slithered between his legs, tripping him. The Prince fell to the ground with a resounding crash.

Metal and air melted together as Savirien-Chorak rained strike over strike upon the Prince, who blocked every one with his shield.

“We don’t have shields in our culture,” murmured Versidue-Shaie to the Emperor. “It seems strange to my boy, I imagine. In our country, if you don’t want to be hit, you move out of the way.”

When Savirien-Chorak was rearing back to begin another series of strikes, the Prince kicked his tail, sending him falling back momentarily. In an instant, he had rebounded, but the Prince was also back on his feet. The two circled one another, until the snake man spun forward, katana extended. The Prince saw his foe’s plan, and blocked the katana with his longsword and the wakizashi with his shield. Its short punching blade impaled itself in the metal, and Savirien-Chorak was thrown off balance.

The Prince’s longblade slashed across the Akaviri’s chest and the sudden, intense pain caused him to drop both his weapons. In a moment, it was over. Savirien-Chorak was prostate in the dust with the Prince’s longsword at his throat.

“The game’s over!” shouted the Emperor, barely heard over the applause from the stadium.

The Prince grinned and helped Savirien-Chorak up and over to a healer. The Emperor clapped his Potentate on the back, feeling relieved. He had not realised when the fight had begun how little chance he had given his son at victory.

“He will make a fine warrior,” said Versidue-Shaie. “And a great Emperor.”

“Just remember,” laughed the Emperor. “You Akaviri have a lot of showy moves, but if just one of our strikes comes through, it’s all over for you.”

“Oh, I’ll remember that,” nodded the Potentate.

Reman thought about that comment for the rest of the games, and had trouble fully controlling himself. Could the Potentate be another enemy, just as the Empress had turned out to be? The matter would bear watching.

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21 Morning Star, 2920
Mournhold, Morrowind

“Why don’t you wear that green gown I gave you?” asked the Duke of Mournhold, watching the young maiden put on her clothes.

“It doesn’t fit,” smiled Turala. “And you know I like red.”

“It doesn’t fit because you’re getting fat,” laughed the Duke, pulling her down on the bed, kissing her breasts and the pouch of her stomach. She laughed at the tickles, but pulled herself up, wrapping her red robe around her.

“I’m round like a woman should be,” said Turala. “Will I see you tomorrow?”
“No,” said the Duke. “I must entertain Vivec tomorrow, and the next day the Duke of Ebonheart is coming. Do you know, I never really appreciated Almalexia and her political skills until she left?”

“It’s the same as me,” smiled Turala. “You will only appreciate me when I’m gone.”

“That’s not true at all,” said the Duke. “I appreciate you now.”

Turala allowed the Duke one last kiss before she was out the door. She kept thinking about what he said. Would he appreciate her more or less when he knew she was getting fat because she was carrying his child? Would she appreciate her enough to marry her?

The Year Continues in 2920, Sun’s Dawn (v2)
Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for mentions of vomit, mentions of sex, and genocide.

Sun’s Dawn
Book Two of 2920
The Last Year of the First Era
by Carlovac Townway

3 Sun’s Dawn, 2920
The Isle of Artaeum, Summerset

Sotha Sil watched the initiates float one by one up to the oassom tree, taking a fruit or flower from its high branches before dropping back to the ground with varying degrees of grace. He took a moment while nodding his head in approval to admire the day. The whitewashed statue of Syrabane, which the great mage was said to have posed for in ancient days, stood at the precipice of the cliff overlooking the bay. Pale purple proscto flowers waved to and fro in the gentle breeze. Beyond, ocean, and the misty border between Artaeum and the main island of Summerset.

“By and large, acceptable,” he proclaimed as the last student dropped her fruit in his hand. With a wave of his hand, the fruit and flowers were back in the tree. With another wave, the students had formed into position in a semicircle around the sorcerer. He pulled a small fibrous ball, about a foot in diameter from his white robes.

“What is this?”

The students understood this test. It asked them to cast a spell of identification on the mysterious object. Each initiate closed his or her eyes and imagined the ball in the realm of the universal Truth. Its energy had a unique resonance as all physical and spiritual matter does, a negative aspect, a duplicate version, relative paths, true meaning, a song in the cosmos, a texture in the fabric of space, a facet of being that has always existed and will always exist.

“A ball,” said a young Nord named Welleg, which brought giggles from some of the younger initiates, but a frown from mist, including Sotha Sil.

“If you must be stupid, at least be amusing,” growled the sorcerer, and then looked at a young, dark-haired Altmer lass who looked confused. “Lilatha, do you know?”

“It’s grom,” said Lilatha, uncertainly. “What the dreugh meff after they’ve k-k-k-kevinasim.”

“Kervinasim, but very good, nonetheless,” said Sotha Sil. “Now, tell me, what does that mean?”

“I don’t know,” admitted Lilatha. The rest of the students also shook their heads.

“There are layers to understanding all things,” said Sotha Sil. “The common man looks at an object
and fits it into a place in his way of thinking. Those skilled in the Old Ways, in the way of the Psijic, in Mysticism, can see an object and identify it by its proper role. But one more layer is needed to be peeled back to achieve understanding. You must identify the object by its role and its truth and interpret that meaning. In this case, the ball is indeed grom, which is a substance created by the dreugh, an underwater race in the north and western parts of the continent. For one year of their life, they undergo karvinasim when they walk upon the land. Following that, they return to the water and meff, or devour the skin and organs they needed for land-dwelling. Then they vomit it up into little balls like this. Grom. Dreugh vomit.”

The students looked at the ball a little queasily. Sotha Sil always loved this lesson.

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4 Sun’s Dawn, 2920

The Imperial City, Cyrodiil

“Spies,” muttered the Emperor, sitting in his bath, staring at a lump on his foot. “All around me, traitors and spies.”

His mistress Rijja washed his back, her legs around his waist. She knew after all these many years when to be sensual and when to be sexual. When he was in a mood like this, it was best to be calmly, soothingly, seductively sensual. And not to say a word unless he asked her a direct question.

Which he did: “What do you think when a fellow steps on his Imperial Majesty’s foot and says, ‘I’m sorry, Your Imperial Majesty’? Don’t you think ‘Pardon me, Your Imperial Majesty’ is more appropriate? ‘I’m sorry,’ well that almost sounds like the bastard Argonian was sorry I was his Imperial Majesty. That we lose the war with Morrowind, that’s what it sounds like.”

“What would make you feel better?” asked Rijja. “Would you like him flogged? He is only, as you say, the Battlechief of Soulrest. It would teach him to mind where he is stepping.”

“My father would have flogged him. My grandfather would have had him killed,” the Emperor grumbled. “But I don’t mind if they all step on my feet, provided they respect me. And don’t plot against me.”

“You must trust someone.”

“Only you,” smiled the Emperor, turning slightly to give Rijja a kiss. “And my son Juilek, I suppose, though I wish he were a little more cautious.”

“And you council, and the Potentate?” asked Rijja.

“A pack of spies and a snake,” laughed the Emperor, kissing his mistress again. As they began to make love, he whispered. “As long as you’re true, I can handle the world.”

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13 Sun’s Dawn, 2920

Mournhold, Morrowind

Turala stood at the black, bejewelled city gates. A wind howled around her, but she felt nothing.

The Duke had been furious upon hearing his favourite mistress was pregnant and cast her from his sight. She tried again and again to see him, but his guards turned her away. Finally, she returned to
her family and told them the truth. If only she had lied and told them she did not know who the father was. A soldier, a wandering adventure, anyone. But she told them the father was the Duke, a member of House Indoril. And they did what she knew they would have to do, as proud members of the House Redoran.

Upon her hand was burned the sign of Expulsion her weeping father had branded on her. But the Duke’s cruelty hurt her far more. She looked out the gate and into the wide winter plains. Twisted, sleeping trees and skies without birds. No one in Morrowind would take her in now. She must go far away.

With slow, sad steps, she began her journey.

16 Sun’s Dawn, 2920

Senchal, Anequina (Modern Day Elsweyr)

“What troubles you,” asked Queen Hasaama, noticing her husband’s sour mood. At the end of most Lover’s Days he was in an excellent mood, dancing in the ballroom with all the guests, but tonight he retired early. When she found him, he was curled in the bed, frowning.

“That blasted bard’s tale about Polydor and Eloisa put me in a rotten state,” he growled. “Why did he have to be so depressing?”

“But isn’t that the truth of the tale, my dear? Weren’t they doomed because of the cruel nature of the world?”

“It doesn’t matter what the truth is, he did a rotten job of telling a rotten tale, and I’m not going to let him do it anymore,” King Dro’Zel spring from the bed. His eyes were rheumy with tears. “Where did they say he was from again?”

“I believe Gilverdale in easternmost Valenwood,” said the Queen, shaken. “My husband, what are you going to do?”

Dro’Zel was out of the room in a single spring, bounding up the stairs to his tower. If Queen Hasaama knew what her husband was going to do, she did not try to stop him. He had been erratic of late, prone to fits and even occasional seizures. But she never suspected the depths of his madness, and his loathing for the bard and the tale of the wickedness and perversity found in mortal man.

19 Sun’s Dawn, 2920

Gilverdale, Valenwood

“Listen to me again,” said the old carpenter. “If cell three holds worthless brass, then cell two holds the gold key. If cell one holds the gold key, then cell three holds worthless brass. If cell two holds worthless brass, then cell one holds the gold key.”

“I understand,” says the lady. “You told me. And so cell one holds the gold key, right?”

“No,” said the carpenter. “Let me start from the top.”

“Mama?” said the little boy, pulling on his mother’s sleeve.
“Just one moment dear, mother’s talking,” she said, concentrating on the riddle. “You said ‘cell three holes the golden key if cell two holds worthless brass,’ right?”

“No,” said the carpenter patiently. “Cell three holds worthless brass if cell two—”

“Mama!” cried the boy. His mother finally looked.

A bright mist was pouring over the town in a wave, engulfing building after building in its wake. Striding before was a red-skinned giant. The Daedra Molag Bal. He was smiling.

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**29 Sun’s Dawn, 2920**  
**Gilverdale, Valenwood**

Almalexia stopped her steed in the vast moor of mud to let him drink from the river. He refused to, even seemed repelled by the water. It struck her as odd; they had been making excellent time from Mournhold, and surely he must be thirsty. She dismounted and joined her retinue.

“Where are we now?” she asked.

One of her ladies pulled out a map. “I thought we were approaching a town called Gilverdale.”

Almalexia closed her eyes and opened them quickly. The vision was too much to bear. As her followers watched, she picked up a piece of brick and a fragment of bone, and clutched them to her heart.

“We must continue on to Artaeum,” she said quietly.

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**The Year Continues in First Seed**
From their vantage point high in the hills, the Emperor Reman III could still see the spires of the Imperial City, but he knew he was far away from hearth and home. Lord Glavius had a luxurious villa, but it was not close to being large enough house the entire army within its walls. Tents lined the hillsides, and the soldiers were flocking to enjoy his lordship’s famous hot springs. Little wonder: winter chill still hung in the air.

“Prince Juilek, your son, is not feeling well.”

When Potentate Versidue-Shaie spoke, the Emperor jumped. How that Akavir could slither across the grass without making a sound was a mystery to him.

“Poisoned, I’d wager,” grumbled Reman. “See to it he gets a healer. I told him to hire a taster like I have, but the boy’s headstrong. There are spies all around us, I know it.”

“I believe you’re right, Your Imperial Majesty,” said Versidue-Shaie. “These are treacherous times, and we must take precautions to see that Morrowind does not win this war, either on the field or by more insidious means. What is why I would suggest that you not lead the vanguard into battle. I know you would want to, as your illustrious ancestors Reman I, Brazollus Dor, and Reman II did, but I fear it would be foolhardy. I hope you do not mind me speaking frankly like this.”

“No,” Reman nodded. “I think you’re right. Who would lead the vanguard then?”

“I would say Prince Juilek, if he were feeling better,” replied the Akavir. “Failing that, Storig of Farrun, with Queen Naghea of Riverhold at left flank, and Warchief Ulaqth of Lilmoth at right flank.”

“A Khajiit at left flank and an Argonian at right,” frowned the Emperor. “I never do trust beastfolk.”

The Potentate took no offence. He knew that “beastfolk” referred to the natives of Tamriel, not to the Tsaesci of Akavir like himself. “I quite agree Your Imperial Majesty, but you must agree that they hate the Dunmer. Ulaqth has a particular grudge after all the slave-raids on his lands by the Duke of Mournhold.”
The Emperor conceded it was so, and the Potentate retired. It was surprising, thought Reman, but for the first time, the Potentate seemed trustworthy. He was a good man to have on one’s side.

18 First Seed, 2920
Ald Erfoud, Morrowind

“How far is the Imperial army?” asked Vivec.

“Two days’ march,” replied his lieutenant. “If we march all night tonight, we can get higher ground at the Pryai tomorrow morning. Our intelligence tells us the Emperor will be commanding the rear, Storig of Farrun has the vanguard, Naghea of Riverhold at left flank, and Ulaqth of Lilmoth at right flank.”

“Ulaqth,” whispered Vivec, an idea forming. “Is this intelligence reliable? Who brought it to us?”

“A Breton sky in the Imperial Army,” said the lieutenant and gestured towards a young, sandy-haired man who stepped forward and bowed to Vivec.

“What is your name and why is a Breton working for us against the Cyrodiils?” asked Vivec, smiling.

“My name is Cassyr Whitley of Dwynnen,” said the man. “And I am working for you because not everyone can say he spied for a god. And I understood it would be, well, profitable.”

Vivec laughed, “It will be, if your information is accurate.

19 First Seed, 2920
Bodrum, Morrowind

The quiet hamlet of Bodrum looked down on the meandering river, the Pryai. It was an idyllic site, lightly wooded where the water took the bend around a steep bluff to the east with a gorgeous wildflower meadow to the west. The strange flora of Morrowind met the strange flora of Cyrodiil on the border and commingled gloriously.

“There will be time to sleep when you’ve finished!”

The soldiers had been hearing that all morning. It was not enough that they had been marching all night, now they were chopping down trees on the bluff and damming the river so its waters spilled over. Most of them had reached the point where they were too tired to complain about being tired.

“Let me be certain I understand, my lord,” said Vivec’s lieutenant. “We take the bluff so we can fire arrows and spells on them from above. That’s why we need all the trees cleared out. Damming the river floods the plains below so they’ll be trudging through mud, which should hamper their movement.”

“That’s exactly half of it,” said Vivec, approvingly. He grabbed a nearby soldier who was hauling off the trees. “Wait, I need you to break the straightest, strongest branches of the trees and whittle them into spears. If you recruit a hundred or so others, it won’t take you more than a few hours to make all we need.”

The soldier wearily did as he bade. The men and women got to work, fashioning spears from the trees.
“If you don’t mind me asking,” said the lieutenant. “The soldiers don’t need any more weapons. They’re too tired to hold the ones they’ve got.”

“These spears aren’t for holding,” said Vivec and whispered, “If we tire them out today, they’ll get a good night’s sleep tonight” before he got to work supervising their work.

It was essential that they be sharp, of course, but equally important that they be well balanced and tapered proportionately. The perfect point for stability was a pyramid, not the conical point of some lances and spears. He had the men hurt the spears they had completed to test their strength, sharpness, and balance, forcing them to begin on a new one if they broke. Gradually, out of sheer exhaustion from doing it wrong, the men learned how to create the perfect wooden spears. Once they were through, he showed them how they were to be arranged and where.

That night, there was no drunken pre-battle carousing, and no nervous neophytes stayed up worrying about the battle to come. As soon as the sun sank beneath the wooded hills, the camp was at rest, but for the sentries.

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20 First Seed, 2920
Bodrum, Morrowind

Miramor was exhausted. For the last six days, he had gambled and whored all night and marched all day. He was looking forward to the battle, but even more than that, he was looking forward to some rest afterwards. He was in the Emperor’s command at the rear flank, which was good because it seemed unlikely that he would be killed. On the other hand, it meant travelling over the mud and waste the army ahead left in their wake.

As they began the trek through the wildflower field, Miramor and all the soldiers surrounding him sank ankle-deep in cold mud. It was an effort to keep moving. Far, far up ahead, he could see the vanguard of the army led by Lord Storig emerging from the meadow at the base of the bluff.

That was when it all happened.

An army of Dunmer appeared above the bluff like rising Daedra, pouring fire and floods of arrows down on the vanguard. Simultaneously, a company of men bearing the flag of the Duke of Mournhold galloped around the shore, disappearing along the shallow river’s edge where it dipped to a timbered glen to the east. Warchief Ulaqth nearby on the right flank let out a bellow of revenge at the sight and gave chase. Queen Naghea sent her flank towards the embankment to the west to intercept the army on the bluff.

The Emperor could think of nothing to do. His troops were too bogged down to move forward quickly and join the battle. He ordered them to face east towards the timber, in case Mournhold’s company was trying to circle around through the woods. They never came out, but many men, facing west, missed the battle entirely. Miramor kept his eyes on the bluff.

A tall Dunmer he supposed must have been Vivec gave a signal, and the battlemages cast their spells at something to the west. From what transpired, Miramor deduced it was a dam. A great torrent of water spilled out, washing Naghea’s left flank into the remains of the vanguard and the two together down river to the east.

The Emperor paused, as if waiting for his vanquished army to return, and then called a retreat. Miramor hid in the rushes until they had passed by and then waded as quietly as he could to the bluff.
The Morrowind army was retiring as well back to their camp. He could hear them celebrating above him as he padded along the shore. To the east, he saw the Imperial Army. They had been washed into a net of spears strung across the river, Naghea’s left flank on Storig’s vanguard on Ulaqth’s right flank, bodies of hundreds of soldiers strung together like beads.

Miramor took whatever valuables he could carry from the corpses and then ran down the river. He had to go many miles before the water was clear again, unpolluted by blood.

29 First Seed, 2920
Hegathe, Hammerfell

“You have a letter from the Imperial City,” said the chief priestess, handing the parchment to Corda. All the young priestesses smiled and made faces of astonishment, but the truth was that Corda’s sister Rijja wrote very often, at least once a month.

Corda took the letter to the garden to read it, her favourite place, an oasis in the monochromatic sand-coloured world of the Conservatorium. The letter itself was nothing unusual: filled with court gossip, the latest fashions which were tending to winedark velvets, and reports of the Emperor’s ever-growing paranoia.

“You are so lucky to be away from all of this,” wrote Rijja. “The Emperor is convinced that his latest battlefield fiasco is all a result of spies in the palace. He has even taken to questioning me. Ruptga keep it so you never have a life as interesting as mine.”

Corda listened to the sounds of the desert and prayed to Ruptga the exact opposite wish.

The Year is Continued in Rain’s Hand
Sotha Sil proceeded as quickly as he could through the blackened halls of the palace, half-submerged in brackish water. All around him, nasty gelatinous scurried into the reeds, bursts of white fire lit up the upper arches of the hall before disappearing, and smells assaulted him, rancid death one moment, sweet coloured perfume the next. Several times he had visited the Daedra princes in their Oblivion, but every time, something different awaited him.

He knew his purpose, and refused to be distracted.

Eight of the more prominent Daedra princes were awaiting him in the half-melted, domed room. Azura, Prince of Dusk and Dawn; Boethiah, Prince of Plots; Herma-Mora, Daedra of Knowledge; Hircine, the Hunter; Malacath, God of Curses; Mehrunes Dagon, Prince of Destruction; Molag Bal, Prince of Rage; Sheogorath, the Mad One.

Above them, the sky cast tormented shadows upon the meeting.

Sotha Sil’s voice cried out, echoing from the cave, “Move the rock!”

Immediately, the initiates obeyed, rolling aside the great boulder that blocked the entrance to the Dreaming Cavern. Sotha Sil emerged, his face smeared with ash, weary. He felt he had been away for months, years, but only a few days had transpired. Lilatha took his arm to help him walk, but he refused her help with a kind smile and a shake of his head.

“Were you… successful?” she asked.

“The Daedra Princes I spoke with have agreed to our terms,” he said flatly. “Disasters such as befell Gilverdale should be averted. Only through certain intermediaries such as witches or sorcerers will they answer the call of man or mer.”

“And what did you promise them in return?” asked the Nord boy Welleg.
“The deals we make with Daedra,” said Sotha Sil, continuing on to Iachesis’s palace to meet with the Master of the Psijic Order, “should not be discussed with the innocent.”

8 Rain’s Hand, 2920
The Imperial City, Cyrodiil

A storm billeted the windows of the Prince’s bedchamber, bringing a smell of moist air to mix with censors filled with burning incense and herbs.

“A letter has arrived from the Empress, your mother,” said the courier. “Anxiously inquiring about your health.”

“What frightened parents I have!” laughed Prince Juilek from his bed.

“It’s only natural for a mother to worry,” said Savirien-Chorak, the Potentate’s son.

“There is everything unnatural about my family, Akavir. My exiled mother fears that my father will imagine me of being a traitor, covetous of the crown, and is having me poisoned,” the Prince sank back into his pillow, annoyed. “The Emperor has insisted on me having a taster for all my meals as he does.”

“There are many plots,” agreed the Akavir. “You have been abed for nearly three weeks with every healer in the empire shuffling through like a slow ballroom dance. At least, all can see that you’re getting stronger.”

“Strong enough to lead the vanguard against Morrowind soon, I hope,” said Juilek.

11 Rain’s Hand, 2920
The Isle of Artaeum, Summerset

The initiates stood quietly in a row along the arbour loggia, watching the long, deep, marble-lined trench ahead of them flash with fire. The air above it vibrated with the waves of heat. Though each student kept his or her face sturdy or emotionless, as a true Psijic should, their terror was nearly as palpable as the heat. Sotha Sil closed his eyes and uttered the chant of fire resist. Slowly, he walked across the basin of leaping flames, climbing to the other side, unscathed. Not even his white robe had been burned.

“The charm is intensified by the energy you bring to it, by your own skills, just as all spells are,” he said. “Your imagination and your willpower are the keys. There is no need for a spell to give you resistance to air, or a resistance to flowers, and after you cast the charm, you must forget there is even a need for a spell to give you resistance to fire. Do not confuse what I am saying: resistance is not about ignoring the fire’s reality. You will feel the substance of flame, the texture of it, its hunger, and even the heat of it, but you will know that it will not hurt or injure you.”

The students nodded and one by one, they cast the spell and made the walk through the fire. Some even went so far as to bend over and scoop up a handful of fire and feed it air, so it expanded like a bubble and melted through their fingers. Sotha Sil smiled. They were fighting their fear admirably.

The Chief Procter Thargallith came running up the arbour arches, “Sotha Sil! Almalexia has arrived on Artaeum. Iachesis told me to fetch you.”

Sotha Sil turned to Thargallith for only a moment, but he knew instantly from the screams what had
transpired. The Nord lad Welleg had not cast the spell properly and was burning. The smell of scorched hair and flesh panicked the other students who were struggling to get out of the basin, pulling him with them, but the incline was too steep away from the entry points. With a wave of a hand, Sotha Sil extinguished the flame.

Welleg and several other students were burned, but not badly. The sorcerer cast a healing spell on them, before turning back to Thargallith.

“I’ll be with you in a moment, and give Almalexia the time to shake the road dust from her train,” Sotha Sil turned back to the students, his voice flat. “Fear does not break spells, but doubt and incompetence are the great enemies of any spellcaster. Master Welleg, you will pack your bags. I will arrange for a boat to bring you to the mainland tomorrow.”

The sorcerer found Almalexia and Iachesis in the study, drinking hot tea, and laughing. She was more beautiful than he had remembered, though he had never before seen her so dishevelled, wrapped in a blanket, dangling her damp long black tresses before the fire to dry. At Sotha Sil’s approach, she leapt to her feet and embraced him.

“Did you swim all the way from Morrowind?” he smiled.

“It’s pouring rain from Skywatch down to the coast,” she explained, returning his smile.

“Only half a league away, and it never rains here,” said Iachesis proudly. “Of course, I sometimes miss the excitement of Summerset, and sometimes even the mainland itself. Still, I’m always very impressed by anyone out there who gets anything accomplished. It is a world of distractions. Speaking of distractions, what’s all this I hear about a war?”

“You mean the one that’s been bloodying the continent for the last eighty years, Master?” asked Sotha Sil, amused.

“I suppose that’s the one I mean,” said Iachesis with a shrug of his shoulders. “How is that war going?”

“We will lose it, unless I can convince Sotha Sil to leave Artaeum,” said Almalexia, losing her smile. She had meant to wait and talk to her friend in private, but the old Altmer gave her the courage to press on. “I have had visions; I know it to be true.”

Sotha Sil was silent for a moment, and then looked at Iachesis, “I must return to Morrowind.”

“Knowing you, if you must do something, you will,” sighed the old Master. “The Psijics’ way is to not be distracted. Wars are fought, Empires rise and fall. You must go, and so must we.”

“What do you mean, Iachesis? You’re leaving the island?”

“No, the island will be leaving the sea,” said Iachesis, his voice taking on a dreamy quality. “In a few years, the mists will move over Artaeum and we will be gone. We are counsellors by nature, and there are too many counsellors in Tamriel as it is. No, we will go, and return when the land needs us again, perhaps in another age.”

The old Altmer struggled to his feet, and drained the last sip of his drink before leaving Sotha Sil and Almalexia alone: “Don’t miss the last boat.”

The Year Continues in Second Seed
“Your Imperial Majesty,” said the Potentate Versidue-Shaie, opening the door to his chamber with a smile. “I have not seen you lately. I thought perhaps you were… indisposed with the lovely Rijja.”

“She’s taking the baths at Mir Corrup,” the Emperor Reman III said miserably.

“Please, come in.”

“I’ve reached the stage where I can only trust three people: you, my son the Prince, and Rijja,” said the Emperor petulantly. “My entire council is nothing but a pack of spies.”

“What seems to be the matter, Your Imperial Majesty?” asked the Potentate Versidue-Shaie sympathetically, drawing closed the thick curtain of his chamber. Instantly all sound outside the room was extinguished, echoing footsteps in the marble halls and birds in the springtide gardens.

“I’ve discovered that a notorious poisoner, an Orma tribeswoman from Black Marsh called Catchica, was with the army at Caer Suvio while we were encamped there when my son was poisoned, before the battle at Bodrum. I’m sure she would have preferred to kill me, but the opportunity didn’t present itself,” the Emperor fumed. “The council suggests we need evidence of her involvement before we prosecute.”

“Of course they would,” said the Potentate thoughtfully. “Particularly if one or more of them was in on the plot. I have a thought, Your Imperial Majesty.”

“Yes?” said Reman impatiently. “Out with it!”

“Tell the Council you’re dropping the matter, and I will send out the Guard to track this Catchica down and follow her. We will see who her friends are, and perhaps get an idea on the scope of this plot on Your Imperial Majesty’s life.”

“Yes,” said Reman with a satisfied frown. “That’s a capital plan. We will track this scheme to whomever it leads to.”
“Decidedly, Your Imperial Majesty,” smiled the Potentate, parting the curtain so the Emperor could leave. In the hallway outside was Versidue-Shaie’s son, Savirien-Chorak. The boy bowed to the Emperor before entering the Potentate’s chamber.

“Are you in trouble, father?” whispered the Akaviri lad. “I heard the Emperor found out about whatsherface, the poisoner.”

“The great art of speechcraft, my boy,” said Versidue-Shaie to his son, “is to tell them what they want to hear in a way that gets them to do what you want them to do. I need you to get a letter to Catchica, and make certain that she understands that if she does not follow the instructions perfectly, she is risking her own life more than ours.”

13 Second Seed, 2920
Mir Corrup, Cyrodiil

Rijja sank luxuriously into the burbling hot spring, feeling her skin tingle like it was being rubbed by millions of little stones. The rock shelf over her head sheltered her from the misting rain, but let all the sunshine in, streaming in layers through the branches of the trees. It was an idyllic moment in an idyllic life, and when she was finished she knew that her beauty would be entirely restored. The only thing she needed was a drink of water. The bath itself, while wonderfully fragrant, tasted always of chalk.

“Water!” she cried to her servants. “Water, please!”

A gaunt woman with rags tied over her eyes ran to her side and dropped a goatskin of water. Rijja was about to laugh at the woman’s prudery—she herself was not ashamed of her naked body—but then she noticed through a crease in the rags that the old woman had no eyes at all. She was like one of those Orma tribesmen Rijja had heard about, but never met. Born without eyes, they were masters of their other senses. The Lord of Mir Corrup hired very exotic servants, she thought to herself.

In a moment, the woman was gone and forgotten. Rijja found it very hard to concentrate on anything but the sun and water. She opened the cork, but the liquid within had a strange, metallic smell to it. Suddenly, she was aware that she was not alone.

“Lady Rijja,” said the captain of the Imperial Guard. “You are, I see, acquainted with Catchica?”

“I’ve never heard of her,” stammered Rijja before becoming indignant. “What are you doing here? This body is not for your leering eyes.”

“Never heard of her, when we saw her with you not a minute ago,” said the captain, picking up the goatskin and smelling it. “Brought you neivous ichor, did she? To poison the Emperor with?”

“Captain,” said one of the guards, running up to him quickly. “We cannot find the Argonian. It is as if she disappeared into the woods.”

“Yes, they’re good at that,” said the captain. “No matter though. We’ve got her contact at court. That should please His Imperial Majesty. Seize her.”

As the guards pulled the writhing naked girl from the pool, she screamed, “I’m innocent! I don’t know what this is all about, but I’ve done nothing! The Emperor will have your heads for this!”

“Yes, I imagine he will,” smiled the captain. “If he trusts you.”
Gideon, Black Marsh

The Sow and Vulture tavern was the sort of out-of-the-way place that Zuuk favoured for these sorts of interviews. Besides himself and his companion, there were only a couple of old seadogs in the shadowy room, and they were more unconscious from drink than aware. The grime of the unwashed floor was something you felt rather than saw. Copious dust hung in the air unmoving in the sparse rays of dying sunlight.

“You have experience in heavy combat?” asked Zuuk. “The reward is good for this assignment, but the risks are great as well.”

“Certainly I have combat experience,” said Miramor haughtily. “I was at the Battle of Bodrum just two months ago. If you do your part and get the Emperor to ride through Dorsza Pass with a minimal escort on the day and time we’ve discussed, I’ll do my part. Just be certain that’s he’s not travelling in disguise. I’m not going to slaughter every caravan that passes through in the hopes that it contains Emperor Reman.”

Zuuk smiled, and Miramor looked at himself in the Kothringi’s reflective face. He liked the way he looked: the consummate confident professional.

“Agreed,” said Zuuk. “And then you shall have the rest of your gold.”

Zuuk placed the large chest onto the table between them. He stood up.

“Wait for a few minutes before leaving,” said Zuuk. “I don’t want you following me. Your employers wish to maintain their anonymity, if by chance you are caught and tortured.”

“Fine by me,” said Miramor, ordering more grog.

Zuuk rode his mount through the cramped labyrinthine streets of Gideon, and both he and his horse were happy to pass through the gates into the country. The main road to Castle Giovesse was flooded as it was every year at springtime, but Zuuk knew a shorter way through the hills. Riding fast under trees drooping with moss and treacherous slime-covered rocks, he arrived at the castle gates in two hours’ time. He wasted no time in climbing to Tavia’s cell at the top of the highest tower.

“What did you think of him?” asked the Empress.

“He’s a fool,” said Zuuk. “But that’s what we want for this sort of assignment.”

Thurzo Fortress, Cyrodiil

Rijja screamed and screamed and screamed. Within her cell, her only audience was the giant grey stones, crusted with moss but still sturdy. The guards outside were deaf to her as they were deaf to all prisoners. The Emperor, miles away in the Imperial City, had likewise been deaf to her cries of innocence.

She screamed knowing well that no one would likely hear her ever again.
Kavas Rim Pass, Cyrodiil

It had been days, weeks since Turala had seen another human face, Cyrodiil or Dunmer. As she trod the road, she thought to herself how strange it was that such an uninhabitable place as Cyrodiil had become the Imperial Province, seat of an Empire. Even the Bosmer in Valenwood must have more populated forests than this Heartland wood.

She thought back. Was it a month ago, two, when she crossed the border from Morrowind into Cyrodiil? It had been much colder then, but other than that, she had no sense of time. The guards had been brusque, but as she was carrying no weaponry, they elected to let her through. Since then, she had seen a few caravans, even shared a meal with some adventurers camping for the night, but met no one that would give her a ride to a town.

Turala stripped off her shawl and dragged it behind her. For a moment, she thought she heard someone behind her and spun around. No one was there. Just a bird perched on a branch making a sound like laughter.

She walked on, and then stopped. Something was happening. The child had been kicking in her belly for some time now, but this was a different kind of spasm. With a groan, she lurched over to the side of the path, collapsing in the grass. Her child was coming.

She lay on her back and pushed, but she could barely see with her tears of pain and frustration. How had it come to this? Giving birth in the wilderness, all by herself, to a child whose father was the Duke of Mournhold? Her scream of rage and agony shook the birds from the trees.

The bird that had been laughing at her earlier flew down the road. She blinked, and the bird was gone and in its place, a naked Elf man stood, not as dark as a Dunmer, but not as pale as the Altmer. She knew at once it was an Ayleid, a Wild Elf. Turala screamed, but the man held her down. After a few minutes of struggle, she felt a release, and then fainted away.

When she awoke, it was to the sound of a baby crying. The child had been cleaned and was lying by her side. Turala picked up her baby girl, and for the first time that year, felt tears of happiness stream down her face.

She whispered to the trees, “Thank you” and began walking with babe in her arms down the road to the west.

The Year is Continued in Mid Year
“The Imperial Army is gathered in the south,” said Cassyr. “They are two weeks march from Ald Iuval and Lake Coronati, heavily armoured.”

Vivec nodded. Ald Iuval and its sister city on the other side of the lake Ald Marak were strategically important fortresses. He had been expecting a move against them for some time. His captain pulled down a map of southwestern Morrowind from the wall and smoothed it out, fighting a gentle summer sea breeze wafting in from the open window.

“They were heavily armoured, you say?” asked the captain.

“Yes, sir,” said Cassyr. “They were camped out near Bethal Gray in the Heartland, and I saw nothing but Ebony, Dwarven, and Daedric armour, fine weaponry, and siege equipment.”

“How about spellcasters and boats?” asked Vivec.


“As heavily armoured as they are, it will take them at least two weeks, like you said, to get from Bethal Gray to Lake Coronati,” Vivec studied the map carefully. “They’d be dragged down in the bogs if they tried to circle around to Ald Marak from the north, so they must be planning to cross the straights here and take Ald Iuval. Then they’d proceed around the lake to the east and take Ald Marak from the south.”

“They’ll be vulnerable along the straights,” said the captain. “Provided we strike when they are more than halfway across and can’t retreat back to the Heartland.”

“Your intelligence has once again served us well,” said Vivec, smiling to Cassyr. “We will beat back the Imperial aggressors yet again.”
Prince Juilek barely paid the man any attention. He was focused on the army packing its camp. It was a cool morning in the forest, but there were no clouds. All the makings of a hot afternoon march, particularly in such heavy armour.

“If we return shortly, it will be because of defeat,” said the Prince. He could see down in the meadow, the Potentate Versidue-Shaie paying his lordship’s steward for the use of the village’s food, wine, and whores. An army was an expensive thing, for certes.

“My Prince,” said Lord Bethal with concern. “Is your army beginning a march due east? That will just lead you to the shores of Lake Coronati. You’ll want to go south-east to get to the straights.”

“You just make certain your merchants get their share of our gold,” said the Prince with a grin. “Let me worry about my army’s direction.”

16 Mid Year, 2920
Lake Coronati, Morrowind

Vivec stared across the blue expanse of the lake, seeing his reflection and the reflection of his army in the cool blue waters. What he did not see was the Imperial Army’s reflection. They must have reached the straights by now, barring any mishaps in the forest. Tall feather-thin lake trees blocked much of his view of the straights, but an army, particularly one clad in slow-moving heavy armour could not move invisibly, silently.

“Let me see the map again,” he called to his captain. “Is there no other way they could approach?”

“We have sentries posted in the swamps to the north in case they’re fool enough to go there and be bogged under,” said the captain. “We would at least hear about it. But there is no other way to cross the lake except through the straights.”

Vivec looked down again at his reflection, which seemed to be distorting his image, mocking him. Then he looked back to the map.

“Spy,” said Vivec, calling Cassyr over. “When you said the army had a horde of battlemages, what made you so certain they were battlemages?”

“They were wearing grey robes with mystical insignia on them,” explained Cassyr. “I figured they were mages, and why else would such a vast number travel with the army? They couldn’t have been healers.”

“You fool!” roared Vivec. “They’re mystics schooled in the art of Alteration. They’ve cast a spell of water breathing on the entire army.”

Vivec ran to a new vantage point where he could see the north. Across the lake, though it was but a small shadow on the horizon, they could see gouts of flames from the assault on Ald Marak. Vivec bellowed with fury and his captain got to work at once redirecting the army to circle the lake and defend the castle.

“Return to Dwynnen,” said Vivec flatly to Cassyr before he rode off to join the battle. “Your services are no longer needed nor wanted.”

It was already too late when the Morrowind army neared Ald Marak. It had been taken by the Imperial Empire.
19 Mid Year, 2920  
The Imperial City, Cyrodiil

The Potentate arrived in the Imperial City amid great fanfare, the streets lined with men and women cheering him as the symbol of the taking of Ald Marak. Truth be told, a greater number would have turned out had the Prince returned, and Versidue-Shaie knew this. Still, it pleased him to no end. Never before had citizens of Tamriel cheered the arrival of an Akaviri into their land.

The Emperor Reman III greeted him with a warm embrace, and then tore into the letter he had brought from the Prince.

“I don’t understand,” he said at last, still joyous but equally confused. “You went under the lake?”

“Ald Marak is a very well-fortified fortress,” explained the Potentate. “As, I might add, the army of Morrowind has rediscovered, now that they are on the outside. To take it, we had to attack by surprise and with our soldiery in our sturdiest armour. By casting the spell that allowed us to breathe underwater, we were able to travel faster than Vivec would have guessed, the weight of the armour made less by the aquatic surroundings, and attack from the water bound west side of the fortress where their defences were at their weakest.”

“Brilliant!” the Emperor crowed. “You are a wondrous tactician, Versidue-Shaie! If your fathers had been as good at this as you are, Tamriel would be Akaviri domain!”

The Potentate had not planned to take credit for Prince Juilek’s design, but on the Emperor’s reference to his people’s fiasco of an invasion two hundred and sixteen years ago, he made up his mind. He smiled modestly and soaked up the praise.

21 Mid Year, 2920  
Ald Marak, Morrowind

Savirien-Chorak slithered to the wall and watched through the arrow slit the Morrowind army retreating back to the forestland between the swamps and the castle grounds. It seemed like the ideal opportunity to strike. Perhaps the forest could be burned and the army within them. Perhaps with Vivec in their enemies’ hands, the army would allow them possession of Ald Iuval as well. He suggested these ideas to the Prince.

“What you seem to be forgetting,” laughed Prince Juilek, “is that I gave my word that no harm would come to the army or to their commanders during the truce negotiations. Do you not have honour during warfare on Akavir?”

“My Prince, I was born here in Tamriel, I have never been to my people’s home,” replied the snake man. “But even so, your ways are strange to me. You expected no quarter and I gave you none when we fought in the Imperial Arena five months ago.”

“That was a game,” replied the Prince, before nodding to the steward to let the Dunmer battle chief in.

Juilek had never seen Vivec before, but he had heard he was a living god. What came before him was but a man. A powerfully built man, handsome, with an intelligent face, but a man nonetheless. The Prince was pleased: a man he could speak with, but not a god.

“Greetings, my worthy adversary,” said Vivec. “We seem to be at an impasse.”
“Not necessarily,” said the Prince. “You don’t want to give us Morrowind, and I can’t fault you for that. But I must have your coastline to protect the Empire from overseas aggressions, and certain key strategic border castles, such as this one, as well as Ald Umbeil, Tel Aruhn, Ald Lambasi, and Tel Mothriva.”

“And in return?” asked Vivec.

“In return?” laughed Savirien-Chorak. “You forget that we are the victors here, not you.”

“In return,” said Prince Juilek carefully, “there will be no Imperial attacks on Morrowind, unless in return to an attack by you. You will be protected from invaders by the Imperial navy. And your land may expand by taking certain estates in Black Marsh, whichever you choose, provided they are not needed by the Empire.”

“A reasonable offer,” said Vivec after a pause. “You must forgive me, I am unused to Cyrodiils who offer something in return for what they take. May I have a few days to decide?”

“We will meet again in a week’s time,” said the Prince, smiling. “In the meantime, if your army provokes no attacks on mine, we are at peace.”

Vivec left the Prince’s chamber, feeling that Almalexia was right. The war was at an end. This Prince would make an excellent Emperor.

The Year Continues in Sun’s Height
The Emperor Reman III and his Potentate Versidue-Shaie took a stroll around the Imperial Gardens. Studded with statuary and fountains, the north gardens fit the Emperor’s mood, as well as being the coolest acreage in the city during the heat of summertide. Austere, tiered flowerbeds of blue-grey and green towered all around them as they walked.

“Vivec has agreed to the Prince’s terms for peace,” said Reman. “My son will be returning in two weeks’ time.”

“This is excellent news,” said the Potentate carefully. “I hope the Dunmer will honour the terms. We might have asked for more. The fortress at Black Gate, for example. But I suppose the Prince knows what is reasonable. He would not cripple the Empire just for peace.”

“I have been thinking lately of Rijja and what caused her to plot against my life,” said the Emperor, pausing to admire a statue of the Slave Queen Alessia before continuing. “The only thing I can think of to account for it is that she admired my son too much. She may have loved me for my power and my personality, but he, after all, is young and handsome and will one day inherit my throne. She must have thought that if I were dead, she could have an Emperor who had both youth and power.”

“The Prince… was in on this plot?” asked Versidue-Shaie. It was a difficult game to play, anticipating where the Emperor’s paranoia would strike next.

“Oh, I don’t think so,” said Reman. “No, my son loves me well.”

“Are you aware that Corda, Rijja’s sister is an initiate of the Morwha Conservatorium in Hegathe?” asked the Potentate.

“Morwha?” asked the Emperor. “I’ve forgotten: which god is that?”


“I am through with lusty women. The Empress, Rijja, a lust for love leads to a lust for power,” the
Emperor shrugged his shoulders. “But a priestess-in-training with a certain healthy appetite sounds ideal. Now what were you saying about the Black Gate?”

6 Sun’s Height, 2920
Thurzo Fortress, Cyrodiil

Rijja stood quietly looking at the cold stone floor while the Emperor spoke. He had never before seen her so pale and joyless. She might at least be pleased that she was being freed, being returned to her homeland. Why, if she left now, she could be in Hammerfell by the Merchant’s Festival. Nothing he said seemed to register any reaction from her. A month and a half’s stay in Thurzo Fortress seemed to have killed her spirit.

“I was thinking,” said the Emperor at last. “Of having your younger sister Corda up at the palace for a time. I think she would prefer it over the Conservatorium in Hegathe, don’t you?”

Reaction, at last. Rijja looked at the Emperor with animal hatred, flinging herself at him in rage. Her fingernails had grown long since her imprisonment and she raked them across his face, into his eyes. He howled with pain, and his guards pulled her off, pummelling her with blows from the back of their swords, until she was knocked unconscious.

A healer was called at once, but the Emperor Reman III had lost his right eye.

23 Sun’s Height, 2920
Balmora, Morrowind

Vivec pulled himself from the water, feeling the heat of the day washed from his skin, taking a towel from one of his servants. Sotha Sil watched his old friend from the balcony.

“It looks like you’ve picked up a few more scars since I last saw you,” said the sorcerer.

“Azura grant it that I have no more for a while,” laughed Vivec. “When did you arrive?”

“A little over an hour ago,” said Sotha Sil, walking down the stairs to the water’s edge. “I thought I was coming to end a war, but it seems you’ve done it without me.”

“Yes, eighty years is long enough for ceaseless battle,” replied Vivec, embracing Sotha Sil. “We made concessions, but so did they. When the old Emperor is dead, we may be entering a golden age. Prince Juilek is very wise for his age. Where is Almalexia?”

“Collecting the Duke of Mournhold. They should be here tomorrow afternoon.”

The men were distracted at a sight from around the corner of the palace—a rider was approaching through the town, heading for the front steps. It was evident that the woman had been riding hard for some time. They met her in the study, where she burst in, breathing hard.

“We have been betrayed,” she gasped. “The Imperial Army have seized the Black Gate.”

24 Sun’s Height, 2920
Balmora, Morrowind

It was the first time in seventeen years that the three members of the Morrowind Tribunal had met in the same place, since Sotha Sil had left for Artaeum. All three wished that the circumstances of
their reunion were different.

“From what we’ve learned, while the Prince was returning to Cyrodiil to the south, a second Imperial Army came from the north,” said Vivec to his stony-faced compatriots. “It is reasonable to assume Juilek didn’t know about the attack.”

“But neither would it be unreasonable to suppose that he planned on being a distraction while the Emperor launched an attack on Black Gate,” said Sotha Sil. “This must be considered a break of the truce.”

“Where is the Duke of Mournhold?” asked Vivec. “I would hear his thoughts on the matter.”

“He is meeting with the Night Mother in Tel Aruhn,” said Almalexia, quietly. “I told him to wait until he had spoken with you, but he said that the matter had waited long enough.”

“He would involve the Morag Tong? In outside affairs?” Vivec shook his head, and looked to Sotha Sil: “Please, do what you can. Assassination will only move us backwards. This matter must be settled with diplomacy or battle.”

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25 Sun’s Height, 2920
Tel Aruhn, Morrowind

The Night Mother met Sotha Sil in her salon, lit only by the moon. She was cruelly beautiful dressed in a simple silk black robe, lounging across her her divan. With a gesture, she dismissed her red-cloaked guards and offered the sorcerer some wine.

“You’ve only just missed your friend, the Duke,” she whispered. “He was very unhappy, but I think we will solve his problem for him.”

“Did he hire the Morag Tong to assassinate the Emperor?” asked Sotha Sil.

“You are straight-forward, aren’t you? That’s good. I love plain-speaking me: it saves so much time. Of course, I cannot discuss with you what the Duke and I talked about,” she smiled. “It would be bad for business.”

“What if I were to offer you an equal amount of gold for you not to assassinate the Emperor?”

“The Morag Tong murders for the glory of Mephala and for profit,” she said, speaking into her glass of wine. “We do not merely kill. That would be sacrilege. Once the Duke’s gold has arrived in three days time, we will do our end of the business. And I’m afraid we would not dream of entertaining a counter offer. Though we are a business as well as a religious order, we do not bow to supply and demand, Sotha Sil.”

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27 Sun’s Height, 2920
The Inner Sea, Morrowind

Sotha Sil had been watching the waters for two days now, waiting for a particular vessel, and now he saw it. A heavy ship with the flag of Mournhold. The sorcerer took to the air and intercepted it before it reached the harbour. A cauld of flame erupted over his figure, disguising his voice and form into that of a Daedra.

“Abandon your ship!” he bellowed. “If you would not sink with it!”
In truth, Sotha Sil could have exploded the vessel with a single ball of fire, but he chose to take his time, to give the crew a chance to dive off into the warm water. When he was certain there was no one living aboard, he focused his energy into a destructive wave that shook the air and water as it discharged. The ship and the Duke’s payment to the Morag Tong sunk to the bottom of the Inner Sea.

“Night Mother,” thought Sotha Sil, as he floated towards shore to alert the harbourmaster that some sailors were in need of rescue. “Everyone bows to supply and demand.”

The Year Continues in Last Seed
1 Last Seed, 2920
Mournhold, Morrowind

They were gathered in the Duke’s courtyard at twilight, enjoying the smell and warmth of a fire of dry branches and bittern green leaves. Tiny embers flew into the sky, hanging for a few moments before vanishing.

“I was rash,” agreed the Duke. “But Lorkhan had his laugh, and all is well. The Morag Tong will not assassinate the Emperor now that my payment is at the bottom of the Inner Sea. I thought you had made some sort of a truce with the Daedra princes.”

“What your sailors called a Daedra may not have been one,” said Sotha Sil. “Perhaps it was a rogue battlemage or even a lightning bolt that destroyed your ship.”

“The Prince and the Emperor are en route to take possession of Ald Lambasi as our truce agreed. It is certainly typical of the Cyrodiil to assume that their concessions are negotiable, while ours are not,” Vivec pulled out a map. “We can meet them here, in this village to the north-west of Ald Lambasi, Fervinthil.”

“But will we meet them to talk,” asked Almalexia, “or to make war?”

No one had an answer to that.

15 Last Seed, 2920
Fervinthil, Morrowind

A late summer squall blew through the small village, darkening the sky except for flashing of lightning which leapt from cloud to cloud like acrobats. Water rushed down the narrow streets ankle-deep, and the Prince had to shout to be heard by his captains but a few feet away from him.

“There’s an inn up ahead! We’ll wait there for the storm to pass before pressing on to Ald Lambasi!”

The inn was warm and dry, and bustling with business. Barmaids were rushing back and forth, bringing greef and wine to a back room, evidently excited about a famous visitor. Someone who
was attracting more attention than the mere heir to the Empire of Tamriel. Amused, Juilek watched them until he overheard the name of “Vivec.”

“My Lord Vivec,” he said, bursting into the back room. “You must believe me, I knew nothing about the attack on Black Gate until after it happened. We will, of course, be returning it to your care forthwith. I wrote a letter to that effect at your palace in Balmora, but obviously you’re not there,” he paused, taking in the many new faces in the room. “I’m sorry, let me introduce myself. I’m Juilek Cyrodiil.”

“My name is Almalexia,” said the most beautiful woman the Prince had ever seen. “Why don’t you join us?”

“Sotha Sil,” said a serious-looking Dunmer in a white cloak, shaking the Prince’s hand and showing him to a seat.

“Indoril Brindisi Dorom, Duke-Prince of Mournhold,” said the massively-built man next to him as he sat down.

“I recognise that the events of the last month suggest, at best, that the Imperial Army is not under my control,” said the Prince after ordering some wine. “This is true. The army is my father’s.”

“I understood that the Emperor was going to be coming to Ald Lambasi as well,” said Almalexia.

“Officially he is,” said the Prince cautiously. “Unofficially, he’s still back in the Imperial City. He’s met with an unfortunate accident.”

Vivec glanced the Duke quickly before looking at the Prince.

“An accident?”

“He’s fine,” said the Prince quickly. “He’ll live, but it looks like he’ll lose an eye. It was an altercation that has nothing to do with the war. The only good news is that while he recovers, I have the use of the seal. Any agreement we make here and now will be binding to the Empire, both in my father’s reign and in mine.”

“Then let’s start agreeing,” smiled Almalexia.

16 Last Seed, 2920
Wroth Naga, Cyrodiil

The tiny hamlet of Wroth Naga greeted Cassyr with its colourful houses perched on a promontory overlooking the stretch of the Wrothgarian mountain plain and High Rock beyond. Had he been in a better mood, the sight would have been breathtaking. As it was, he could only think that in practical terms, a small village like this would have meagre provisions for himself and his horse.

He rode down into the main square, where an inn called the Eagle’s Cry stood. Directing the stable boy to house and feed his horse, Cassyr walked into the inn and was surprised by its ambience. A minstrel he had heard play once in Gilverdale was performing a jaunty old tune to the clapping of the mountain men. Such forced merriment was not what Cassyr wanted at the moment. A glum Dunmer woman was seated at the only table far from the noise, so he took his drink there and sat down without invitation. It was only when he did so that he noticed she was holding a newborn baby.

“I’ve just come from Morrowind,” he said rather awkwardly, lowering his voice. “I’ve been
fighting for Vivec and the Duke of Mournhold against the Imperial Army. A traitor to my people, I guess you’d call me.”

“I am also a traitor to my people,” said the woman, holding up her hand which was scarred with a branded symbol. “It means I can never go back to my homeland.”

“Well, you’re not thinking of staying here, are you?” laughed Cassyr. “It’s certainly quaint, but come wintertide, there’s going to be snow up to your eyelashes. It’s no place for a new baby. What’s her name?”

“Bosriel. It means ‘Beauty of the Forest’. Where are you going?”

“Dwynnen, on the bay in High Rock. You’re welcome to join me, I could use the company.” He held out his hand. “Cassyr Whitley.”

“Turala,” said the woman after a pause. She was going to use her family’s name first, as is tradition, but she realised that it was no longer her name. “I would love to accompany you, thank you.”

19 Last Seed, 2920  
Ald Lambasi, Morrowind

Five men and two women stood in the silence of the Great Room of the castle, the only sound the scrawl of quill on parchment and the gentle tapping of rain on the large picture window. As the Prince set the seal of Cyrodiil on the document, the peace was made official. The Duke of Mournhold broke out in a roar of delight, ordering wine brought in to commemorate the end of eighty years of war.

Only Sotha Sil stood apart from the group. His face betrayed no emotion. Those who knew him best knew he did not believe in beginnings and endings, but the continuous cycle of which this was but a small part.

“My Prince,” said the castle steward, unhappy at breaking the celebration. “There is a messenger here from your mother, the Empress. He asked to see your father, but as he did not arrive—”

Juilek excused himself and went to speak with the messenger.

“The Empress does not live in the Imperial City?” asked Vivec.

“No,” said Almalexia, shaking her head sadly. “Her husband has imprisoned her in Black Marsh, fearing that she was plotting a revolution against him. She is extremely wealthy and has powerful allies in the western Colovian estates so he could not marry another or execute her. They’ve been at an impasse for the last seventeen years since Juilek was a child.”

The Prince returned a few minutes later. His face betrayed his anxiety, though he took troubles to hide it.

“My mother needs me,” he said simply. “I’m afraid I must leave at once. If I may have a copy of the treaty, I will bring it with me to show the Empress the good we have done today, and then I will carry it on to the Imperial City so it may be made official.”

Prince Juilek left with the fond farewells of the Three of Morrowind. As they watched him ride out into the rainswept night south towards Black Marsh, Vivec said, “Tamriel will be much healed when he has the throne.”
The moon was rising over the desolate quarry, steaming with swamp gas from a particularly hot summer as the Prince and his two guard escort rode out of the forest. The massive piles of earth and dung had been piled high in antiquity by some primitive, long-dead tribe of Black Marsh, hoping to keep out some evil from the north. Evidently, the evil had broken through at Dorsza Pass, the large crack in the sad, lonely rampart that stretched for miles.

The black twisted trees that grew on the barrier cast strange shadows down, like a net tangling. The Prince’s mind was on his mother’s cryptic letter, hinting at the threat of an invasion. He could not, of course, tell the Dunmer about it, at the very least until he knew more and had notified his father. After all, the letter had been for him. It was its urgent tone that made him decide to go directly to Gideon.

The Empress had also warned him about a band of former slaves who attacked the caravans going into Dorsza Pass. She advised him to be certain to make his Imperial shield visible, so they would know he was not one of the hated Dunmer. Upon riding into the tall weeds that flooded through the pass like a noxious river, the Prince ordered that his shield be displayed.

“I can see why the slaves use this,” said the Prince’s captain. “It’s an excellent location for an ambush.”

Juilek nodded his head, but his thoughts were elsewhere. What threat of invasion could the Empress have discovered? Were the Akaviri on the seas again? If so, how could his mother from her cell in Castle Giovesse know of it? A rustle in the weeds and a single sharp human cry behind him interrupted his pondering.

Turning around, the Prince discovered that he was alone. His escort had vanished.

The Prince peered over the stretch of the moonlit sea of grass which waved in almost hypnotic patterns to the ebb and flow of the night wind billowing through the pass. It was impossible to tell if a struggling soldier beneath this system of vibrations, a dying horse behind another. A high, whistling wind frowned out any sound the victims of the ambush might be making.

Juilek drew his sword, and thought about what to do, his mind willing his heart not to panic. He was closer to the exit of the pass than the entrance. Whatever had slain his escort must have been behind him. If he rode fast enough, perhaps he could outrun it. Spurring his horse to gallop, he charged for the hills ahead, framed by the mighty black piles of dirt.

When he was thrown, it was so suddenly, he was hurled forward before he was truly conscious of the fact. He landed several yards behind where his horse had fallen, breaking his shoulder and back on impact. A numbness washed over him as he stared at his poor, dying steed, its belly sliced open by one of several spears jutting up just below the surface of the grass.

Prince juilek was not able to turn and face the figure that emerged from the grass, nor able to move to defend himself. His throat was cut without ceremony.

Miramor cursed when he saw the face of his victim more clearly in the moonlight. He had seen the Emperor at the Battle of Bodrum when he fought in His Imperial Majesty’s command, and this was clearly not the Emperor. Searching the body, he found the letter and a treaty signed by Vivec, Almalexia, Sotha Sil, and the Duke of Mournhold representing Morrowind and the Prince Juilek Cyrodiil, presenting the Cyrodiil Empire.
“Curse my luck,” muttered Miramor to himself and the whispering grass. “I’ve only killed a Prince. Where’s the reward in that?”

Miramor destroyed the letter, as Zuuk had instructed him to do, and pocketed the treaty. At the very least, such a curiosity would have some market value. He disassembled the traps as he pondered his next step. Return to Gideon and ask for a lesser reward for killing the heir? Move on to other lands? At the very least, he considered, he had picked up two useful skills from the Battle of Bodrum. From the Dunmer, he had learned the excellent spear trap. And abandoning the Imperial Army, he had learned how to skulk in the grass.

The Year is Continued in Hearth Fire
Gideon, Black Marsh

The Empress Tavia lay across her bed, a hot late summer wind she could not feel banging the shutters of her cell to and fro against the iron bars. Her throat felt like it was on fire but she still sobbed, uncontrollably, wringing her last tapestry in her hands. Her wailing echoed through the hollow halls of Castle Giovesse, stopping maids in their washing and guards in their conversation. One of her women came up the narrow stairs to see her mistress, but her chief guard Zuuk stood at the doorway and shook his head.

“She’s just heard that her son is dead,” he said quietly.

The Imperial City, Cyrodiil

“Your Imperial Majesty,” said the Potentate Versidue-Shaie through the door. “You can open the door. I assure you, you’re perfectly safe. No one wants to kill you.”

“Mara’s blood!” came the Emperor Reman III’s voice, muffled, hysterical, tinged with madness. “Someone assassinated the Prince, and he was holding my shield! They could have thought he was me!”

“You’re certainly correct, Your Imperial Majesty,” replied the Potentate, expunging any mocking qualities from his voice while his black-slitted eyes rolled contemptuously. “And we must find and punish the evildoer responsible for your son’s death. But we cannot do it without you. You must be brave for your Empire.”

There was no reply.

“At the very least, come out and sign the order for Lady Rijja’s execution,” called the Potentate. “Let us dispose of the one traitor and assassin we know of.”

A brief pause, and then the sound of furniture scraping across the floor. Reman opened the door just a crack, but the Potentate could still see his angry, fearful face, and the terrible mound of ripped tissue that used to be his right eye. Despite the best healers in the Empire, it was still a
ghastly souvenir of the Lady Rijja’s work in Thurzo Fortress.

“Hand me the order,” the Emperor snarled. “I’ll sign it with pleasure.”

6 Hearth Fire, 2920
Gideon, Black Marsh

The strange blue glow of the will o’ the wisps, a combination, so she’d been told, of swamp gas and spiritual energy, had always frightened Tavia as she looked out her window. Now it seemed strangely comforting. Beyond the bog lay the city of Gideon. It was funny, she thought, that she had never stepped foot in its streets, though she had watched it every day for seventeen years.

“Can you think of anything I’ve forgotten?” she asked, turning to look back on the loyal Kothringi Zuuk.

“I know exactly what to do,” he said simply. He seemed to smile, but the Empress realised that it was only her own face reflected in his silvery skin. She was smiling, and she didn’t even realise it.

“Make certain you aren’t followed,” she warned. “I don’t want my husband to know where my golds been hiding all these years. And do take your share of it. You’ve been a good friend.”

The Empress Tavia stepped forward and dropped from sight into the mists. Zuuk replaced the bars on the tower window, and threw a blanket over some pillows on her bed. With any luck, they would not discover her body on the lawn until morning, at which time he hoped to be halfway to Morrowind.

9 Hearth Fire, 2920
Phrygias, High Rock

The strange trees on all sides resembled knobby piles crowned with great bursts of red, yellows, and oranges, like insect mounds caught on fire. The Wrothgarian Mountains were fading into the misty afternoon. Turala marvelled at the sight, so alien, so different from Morrowind, as she plodded her horse forward into an open pasture. Behind her, head nodding against his chest, Cassyr slept, cradling Bosriel. For a moment, Turala considered jumping the low painted fence that crossed the field, but she thought better of it. Let Cassyr sleep for a few more hours before giving him the reins.

As the horse passed into the field, Turala saw the small green house on the next hill, half-hidden in forest. So picturesque was the image, she felt herself lull into a pleasant half-sleeping state. A blast of a horn brought her back to reality with a shudder. Cassyr opened his eyes.

“Where are we?” he hissed.

“I don’t know,” Turala stammered, wide-eyed. “What is that sound?”

“Orcs,” he whispered. “A hunting party. Head for the thicket quickly.”

Turala trotted the horse into the small collection of trees. Cassyr handed her the child and dismounted. He began pulling their bags off next, throwing them into the bushes. A sound started then, a distant rumbling of footsteps, growing louder and closer. Turala climbed off carefully and helped Cassyr unburden the horse. All the while, Bosriel watched open-eyed. Turala sometimes worried that her baby never cried. Now she was grateful for it. With the last of the luggage off,
Cassyr slapped the horse’s read, sending it galloping into the field. Taking Turala’s hand, he hunkered down in the bushes.

“With luck,” he murmured, “they’ll think she’s wild or belongs to the farm and won’t go looking for the rider.”

A he spoke, a horde of orcs surged into the field, blasting their horns. Turala had seen orcs before, but never in such abundance, never with such bestial confidence. Roaring in delight at the horse and its confused state, they hastened past the timber where Cassyr, Turala, and Bosriel hid. The wildflowers flew into the air at their stampede, powdering the air with seeds. Turala tried to hold back a sneeze, and thought she succeeded. One of the orcs had heard something though, and brought another with him to investigate.

Cassyr quietly unsheathed his sword, mustering all the confidence he could. His skills, such as they were, were in spying, not combat, but he vowed to protect Turala and her babe for as long as possible. Perhaps he would slay these two, he reasoned, but not before they cried out and brought the rest of the horde.

Suddenly, something invisible swept through the bushes like a wind. The orcs flew backwards, falling dead on their backs. Turala turned and saw a wrinkled crone with bright red hair emerge from a nearby bush.

“I thought you were going to bring ‘em right to me,” she whispered, smiling. “Best come with me.”

The three followed the old woman through a deep crevasse of bramble bushes that ran through the field toward the house on the hill. As they emerged on the other side, the woman turned to look at the orcs feasting on the remains of the horse, a blood-soaked orgy to the beat of multiple drums.

“That horse yours?” she asked. When Cassyr nodded, she laughed loudly. “That’s rich meat, that is. Those monsters’ll have bellyaches and flatulence in the morning. Serves ‘em right.”

“Shouldn’t we keep moving?” whispered Turala, unnerved by the woman’s laughter.

“They won’t come up here,” she grinned, looking at Bosriel who smiled back. “They’re too afraid of us.”

Turala turned to Cassyr, who shook his head. “Witches. Am I correct in assuming that this is Old Barbyn’s farm, the home of the Skeffington Coven?”

“You are, pet,” the old woman giggled girlishly, pleased to be so infamous. “I am Mynista Skeffington.”

“What did you do to those orcs?” asked Turala. “Back there in the thicket?”

“Spirit fist right side the head,” Mynista said, continuing to climb up the hill. Ahead of them was the farmhouse grounds, a well, a chicken coop, a pond, women of all ages doing chores, the laughter of children at play. The old woman turned and saw that Turala did not understand. “Don’t you have witches where you come from, child?”

“None that I know of,” she said.

“There are all sorts of wielders of magic in Tamriel,” she explained. “The Psijics magic like its their painful duty. The battlemages in the army on the other end of the scale hurl spells like arrows. We witches commune and conjure and celebrate. To fell these orcs, I merely whispered to the spirits of the air, Amaro, Pina, Tallatha, the fingers of Kynareth, and the breath of the world, with
whom I have an intimate acquaintance, to smack those bastards dead. You see, conjuration is not about might, or solving riddles, or agonising over musty old scrolls. It’s about fostering relations. Being friendly, you might say.”

“Well, we certainly appreciate you being friendly with us,” said Cassyr.

“As well you might,” coughed Mynista. “Your kind destroyed the orc homeland two thousand years ago. Before that, they never came all the way up here and bothered us. Now let’s get you cleaned up and fed.”

With that, Mynista led them into the farm, and Turala met the family of the Skeffington Coven.

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### 11 Hearth Fire, 2920
**The Imperial City, Cyrodiil**

Rijja had not even tried to sleep the night before, and she found the somber music played during her execution to have a soporific effect. It was as if she was willing herself to be unconscious before the axe stroke. Her eyes were bound so she could not see her former lover, the Emperor, seated before her, glaring with his one good eye. She could not see the Potentate Versidue-Shaie, his coil neatly wrapped beneath him, a look of triumph in his golden face. She could feel, numbly, the executioner’s hand touch her back to steady her. She flinched like a dreamer trying to awake.

The first blow struck the back of her head and she screamed. The next hacked through her neck, and she was dead.

The Emperor turned to the Potentate wearily, “Now that’s done. You said she had a pretty sister in Hammerfell named Corda?”

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### 18 Hearth Fire, 2920
**Dwynnen, High Rock**

The horse the witches had sold him were not as good as his old one, Cassyr considered. Spirit worship and sacrifice and sisterhood might be all well and good for conjuring spirits, but it tends to spoil beasts of burden. Still, there was little to complain about. With the Dunmer woman and her child gone, he had made excellent time. Ahead were the walls surrounding the city of his homeland. Almost at once, he was set upon by his old friends and family.

“How went the war?” cried his cousin, running to the road. “Is it true that Vivec signed a peace treaty with the Prince, but the Emperor refuses to honour it?”

“That’s not how it was, was it?” asked a friend, joining them. “I heard that the Dunmer had the Prince murdered and then made up a story about a treaty, but there’s no evidence for it.”

“Isn’t there anything interesting happening here?” Cassyr laughed. “I really don’t have the least interest in discussing the war or Vivec.”

“You missed the procession of the Lady Corda,” said his friend. “She came across the bay with full entourage and then east to the Imperial City.”

“But that’s nothing. What was Vivec like?” asked his cousin eagerly. “He’s supposed to be a living god.”

“If Sheogorath steps down and they need another God of Madness, he’ll do,” said Cassyr
“And the women?” asked the lad, who had only seen Dunmer ladies on very rare occasions.

Cassyr merely smiled. Turala Skeffington flashed into his mind for an instant before fading away. She would be happy with the coven, and her child would be well cared for. But they were part of the past now, a place and a war he wanted to forget forever. Dismounting his horse, he walked into the city, chatting of trivial gossip of life on the Iliac Bay.

The Year Continues in Frostfall
The creature before them blinked, senseless, its eyes glazed, mouth opening and closing as if relearning its function. A thin glob of saliva burbled down between its fangs, and hung suspended. Turala had never seen any of its kind before, reptilian and massive, perched on its hind legs like a man. Mynistera applauded enthusiastically.

“My child,” she crowed. “You have come so far in so short a time. What were you thinking when you summoned this daedroth?”

It took Turala a moment to recall whether she was thinking anything at all. She was merely overwhelmed that she had reached out across the fabric of reality into the realm of Oblivion, and plucked forth this loathsome creature, conjuring it into the world by the power of her mind.

“I was thinking of the colour red,” Turala said, concentrating. “The simplicity and clarity of it. And then—I desired, and spoke the charm. And this is what I conjured up.”

“Desire is a powerful force for a young witch,” said Mynistera. “And it is well matched in this instance. For this daedroth is nothing if not a simple force of the spirits. Can you release your desires as easily?”

Turala closed her eyes and spoke the dismissal invocation. The monster faded away like a painting in sunlight, still blinking confusedly. Mynistera embraced her Dark Elf pupil, laughing with delight.

“I never would have believed it, a month and a day you’ve been with the coven, and you’re already more advanced than most of the women here. There is powerful blood in you, Turala, you touch spirits like you were touching a lover. You’ll be leading this coven one day—I have seen it!”

Turala smiled. It was good to be complimented. The Duke of Mournhold had praised her pretty face; her family, before she had dishonoured them, praised her manners. Cassyr had been nothing more than a companion: his compliments meant nothing. But with Mynistera, she felt she was home.

“You’ll be leading the coven for many years yet, great sister,” said Turala.
“I certainly intend to. But the spirits, while marvellous companions and faultless tellers of truth, are often hazy about the when and hows. You can’t blame them really. When and how means so little to them,” Mynistera opened the door to the shed, allowing the brisk autumn breeze in to dispel the bitter and fetid smells of the daedroth. “Now, I need you to run an errand to Wayrest. It’s only a week’s ride there, and a week’s ride back. Bring Doryatha and Celephyna with you. As much as we try to be self-sufficient, there are herbs we can’t grow here, and we seem to run through an enormous quantity of gems in no time at all. It’s important that the people of the city learn to recognise you as one of the wise women of Skeffington coven. You’ll find the benefits of being notorious far outweigh the inconveniences.”

Turala did as she was bade. As she and her sisters climbed aboard their horses, Mynistera brought her the child, little five-month-old Bosriel to kiss her mother good-bye. The witches were in love with the little Dunmer infant, fathered by a wicked Duke, birthed by wild Ayleid elves in the forest heart of the Empire. Turala knew her nursemaids would protect her child with their lives. After many kisses and a farewell wave, the three young witches rode off into the bright woods, under a cover of red, yellow, and orange.

12 Frostfall, 2920
Dwynnen, High Rock

For a Middas evening, the Least Loved Porcupine tavern was wildly crowded. A roaring fire in the pit in the centre of the room cast an almost sinister glow on all the regulars, and made the abundance of bodies look like a punishment tapestry inspired by the Arcturian Heresies. Cassyr took his usual place with his cousin and ordered a flagon of ale.

“Have you been to see the Baron?” asked Palyth.

“Yes, he may have work for me in the palace of Urvaius,” said Cassyr proudly. “But more than that I can’t say. You understand, secrets of state and all that. Why are there so many damned people here tonight?”

“A shipload of Dunmer just came in to harbour. They’ve come from the war. I was just waiting until you got here to introduce you as another veteran.”

Cassyr blushed, but regained his composure enough to ask: “What are they doing here? Has there been a truce?”

“I don’t know the full story,” said Palyth, “but apparently, the Emperor and Vivec are in negotiations again. These fellas here have investments they were keen to check on, and they figured things on the Bay were quiet enough. But the only way we can get the full story is to talk to the chaps.”

With that, Palyth gripped his cousin’s arm and pulled him to the other side of the bar so suddenly, Cassyr would have had to struggle violently to resist. The Dunmer travellers were spread out across four of the tables, laughing with the locals. They were largely amiable young men, well-dressed, befitting merchants, animated in gesture made more extravagant by liquor.

“Excuse me,” said Palyth, intruding on the conversation. “My shy cousin Cassyr was in the war as well, fighting for the living god, Vivec.”

“The only Cassyr I’ve ever heard of,” said one of the Dunmer drunkenly with a wide, friendly smile, shaking Cassyr’s free hand, “was a Cassyr Whitley, who Vivec said was the worst spy in history. We lost Ald Marak due to his bungling intelligence work. For your sake, friend, I hope the
two of you were never confused.

Cassyr smiled and listened as the lout told the story of his failure with bountiful exaggerations which caused the table to roar with laughter. Several eyes looked his way, but none of the locals sought to explain that the fool of the tale was standing at attention. The eyes that stung the most were his cousin’s, the young man who had believed that he had returned to Dwynnen a great hero. At some point, certainly, the Baron would hear about it, his idiocy increasing manifold with each retelling.

With every fibre in his soul, Cassyr cursed the living god Vivec.

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21 Frostfall, 2920
The Imperial City, Cyrodiil

Corda, in a robe of blinding whiteness, a uniform of the priestesses of the Hegathe Morwha Conservatorium, arrived in the City just as the first winter storm was passing. The clouds broke with sunlight, and the beauteous teenaged Redguard girl appeared in the wide avenue with escort, riding toward the Palace. While her sister was tall, thin, angular, and haughty, Corda was a small round-faced lass with wide brown eyes. The locals were quick to draw comparisons.

“Not a month after Lady Rijja’s execution,” muttered a housemaid, peering out the window, and winking to her neighbour.

“And not a month out of the nunnery neither,” the other woman agreed, revelling in the scandal. “This one’s in for a ride. Her sister weren’t so innocent, and look where she ended up.”

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24 Frostfall, 2920
Dwynnen, High Rock

Cassyr stood on the harbour and watched the early sleet fall on the water. It was a pity, he thought, that he was prone to sea-sickness. There was nothing for him now in Tamriel to the east or the west. Vivec’s tale of his poor spycraft had spread to taverns everywhere. The Baron of Dwynnen had released him from his contract. No doubt they were laughing about him in Daggerfall, too, and Dawnstar, Lilmoth, Rimmen, Greenheart, probably in Akavir and Yokuda for that matter. Perhaps it would be best to drop into the waves and sink. The thought, however, did not stay in his mind for long: it was not despair that haunted him, but rage. Impotent fury that he could not assuage.

“Excuse me, sir,” said a voice behind him, making him jump. “I’m sorry to disturb you, but I was wondering whether you could recommend an inexpensive tavern for me to spend the night.”

It was a young man, a Nord, with a sack over his shoulder. Obviously, he had just disembarked from one of the boats. For the first time in weeks, someone was looking at Cassyr as something other than a colossal, famous idiot. He could not help, black as his mood was, but he was friendly.

“You’ve just arrived from Skyrim?” asked Cassyr.

“No, sir, that’s where I’m going,” said the follow. “I’m working my way home. I’ve come up from Sentinel, and before that Stros M’kai, and before that Woodhearth in Valenwood, and before that Artaeum in Summerset. Welleg’s my name.”

Cassyr introduced himself and shook Welleg’s hand. “Did you say you came from Artaeum? Are you a Psijic?”
“No, sir, not anymore,” the fellow shrugged. “I was expelled.”

“No, I want to cast a curse on a particularly powerful person, one might say a living god, and I haven’t any luck. The Baron won’t let me in his sight, but the Baroness has sympathy for me and allowed me the use of their Summoning Chambers.” Cassyr spat. “I did all the rituals, made sacrifices, but nothing came of it.”

“That’d be because of Sotha Sil, my old master,” replied Welleg with some bitterness. “The Daedra princes have agreed not to be summoned by any amateurs at least until the war ends. Only the Psijics may counsel with the daedra, and a few nomadic sorcerers and witches.”

“Witches, did you say?”

29 Frostfall, 2920
Phrygias, High Rock

Pale sunlight flickered behind the mist bathing the forest as Turala, Doryatha, and Celephyna drove their horses on. The ground was wet with a thin layer of frost, and laden down with goods it was a slippery way over unpaved hills. Turala tried to contain her excitement about coming back to the coven. Wayrest had been an adventure, and she adored the looks of fear and respect the city folk had given her. But for the last few days, all she could think of was returning to her sisters and her child.

A bitter wind whipped her hair forward so she could see nothing but the path ahead. She did not hear the rider approach to her side until he was almost upon her. When she turned and saw Cassyr, she shouted with as much surprise as pleasure at meeting an old friend. His face was pale and drawn, but she took it to be merely from travel.

“What brings you back to Phrygias?” she smiled. “Were you not treated well in Dwynnen?”

“Well enough,” said Cassyr. “I have need of the Skeffington coven.”

“Ride with us,” said Turala. “I’ll bring you to Mynistera.”

The four continued on, and the witches regaled Cassyr with the tales of Wayrest. It was evident that it was also a rare treat for Doryatha and Celephyna to leave Old Barbyn’s Farm. They had been born there, as daughters and grand-daughters of Skeffington witches. Ordinary High Rock city life was exotic to them as it was to Turala. Cassyr said little, but smiled and nodded his head, which was encouragement enough. Thankfully, none of the stories they had heard were about his own stupidity. Or at the very least, they did not tell him.

Doryatha was in the midst of a tale she had heard in a tavern about a thief who had been locked overnight in a pawnshop when they crossed over a familiar hill. Suddenly, she halted in her story. The barn was supposed to be visible, but it was not. The other three followed her gaze into the fog, and a moment later, they rode as fast as they could towards what was once the site of the Skeffington coven.

The fire had long since burned out. Nothing but ashes, skeletons, and broken weaponry remained. Cassyr recognised at once the signs of an orc raid.

The witches fell from their horses, racing through the remains, wailing. Celephyna found a tattered, bloody piece of cloth that she recognised from Mynistera’s cloak. She held it to her ashen face, sobbing. Turala screamed for Bosriel, but the only reply was the high whistling wind through the
“Who did this?” she cried, tears streaming down her face. “I swear I’ll conjure up the very flames of Oblivion! What have they done with my baby?”

“I know who did it,” said Cassyr quietly, dropping from his horse and walking towards her. “I’ve seen these weapons before. I fear I met the very fiends responsible in Dwynnen, but I never thought they’d find you. This is the work of assassins hired by the Duke of Mournhold.”

He paused. The lie came easily. Adopt and improvise. What’s more, he could tell instantly that she believed it. Her resentment over the cruelty the Duke had shown her had quieted, but never disappeared. One look at her burning eyes told him that she would summon the daedra and wreak his, and her, revenge upon Morrowind. And what’s more, he knew they’d listen.

And listen they did. For the power that is greater than desire is rage. Even rage misplaced.

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**The Year Continues in Sun’s Dusk**
“A man to see you, Night Mother,” said the guard. “A Kothringi tribesman who presents his credentials as Lord Zuuk of Black Marsh, part of the Imperial Garrison of Gideon.”

“What makes you think I’d have even the slightest interest in seeing him?” asked the Night Mother with venomous sweetness.

“He brings a letter from the late Empress of the Cyrodilic Empire.”

“We are have a busy day,” she smiled, clapping her hands together with delight. “Show him in.”

Zuuk entered the chamber. His metallic skin, though exposed only at his face and hands, caught the light of the fireplace and the lightning of the stormy night from the window. The Night Mother noted also that she could see herself as he saw her: serene, beautiful, fear-inspiring. He handed her his letter from the Empress without a word. Sipping her wine, she read it.

“The Duke of Mournhold also offered me an appreciable sum to have the Emperor murdered earlier this year,” she said, folding the letter. “His payment sunk, and never was delivered. It was a considerable annoyance, particularly as I had already gone to the trouble of putting one of my agents in the palace. Why should I assume that your more-than-generous payment, from a dead woman, will arrive?”

“I brought wit with me,” said Zuuk simply. “It is in the carriage outside.”

“Then bring it in and our business is complete,” smiled the Night Mother. “The Emperor will be dead by year’s end. You may leave the gold with Apaladith. Unless you’d care for some wine?”

Zuuk declined the offer and withdrew. The moment he left the room, Miramor slipped noiselessly back from behind the dark tapestry. The Night Mother offered him a glass of wine, and he accepted it.

“I know that fellow, Zuuk,” said Miramor carefully. “I didn’t know he worked for the old Empress though.”
“Let’s talk about you some more, if you don’t mind,” she said, knowing he would, in fact, not mind.

“Let me show you my worth,” said Miramor. “Let me be the one to do the Emperor in. I’ve already killed his son, and you saw there how well I can hide myself away. Tell me you saw one ripple in the tapestry.”

The Night Mother smiled. Things were falling into place rather nicely.

“If you know how to use a dagger, you’ll find him in Bodrum,” she said, and described to him what he must do.

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3 Sun’s Dusk, 2920
Mournhold, Morrowind

The Duke stared out the window. It was early morning, and for the fourth straight day, a red mist hung over the city, flashing lightning. A freakish wind blew through the streets, ripping his flags from the castle battlements, forcing all his people to close their shutters tightly. Something terrible was coming to his land. He was not a greatly learned man, but he knew the signs. So too did his subjects.

“When will my messengers reach the Three?” he growled, turning to his castellan.

“Vivec is far to the north, negotiating the treaty with the Emperor,” the man said, his face and voice trembling with fear. “Almalexia and Sotha Sil are in Necrom. Perhaps they can be reached in a few days time.”

The Duke nodded. He knew his messengers were fast, but so too was the hand of Oblivion.

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6 Sun’s Dusk, 2920
Bodrum, Morrowind

Torchlight caught in the misting snow gave the place an otherworldly quality. The soldiers from both camps found themselves huddled together around the largest bonfire: winter bringing enemies of four score years of warring close together. While only a few of the Dunmer guard could speak Cyrodilic, they found common ground battling for warmth. When a pretty Redguard maiden passed into their midst to warm herself before moving back to the treaty tent, many a man from both armies raised their eyes in approval.

The Emperor Reman III was eager to leave negotiations before they had ever begun. A month earlier, he thought is was a sign of good will to meet at the sight of his defeat to Vivec’s army, but the place brought back more bad memories than he thought it would. Despite the protestations of Potentate Versidue-Shaie that the rocks of the river were naturally red, he could swear he saw splatters of his soldier’s blood.

“We have all the particulars of the treaty,” he said, taking a glass of hot yuelle from his mistress Corda. “But here and now is not the place for signing. We should do it at the Imperial Palace, with all the pomp and slender this historic occasion demands. You must bring Almalexia with you also; and that wizard fellow.”

“Sotha Sil,” whispered the Potentate.
“When?” asked Vivec with infinite patience.

“In exactly a month’s time,” said the Emperor, smiling munificently and clambering awkwardly to his feet. “We will hold a grand ball to commemorate. Now I must take a walk. My legs are all cramped up with the weather. Corda, my dear, will you walk with me?”

“Of course, Your Imperial Majesty,” she said, helping him towards the tent’s entrance.

“Would you like me to come with you as well, Your Imperial Majesty?” asked Versidue-Shaie.

“Or I?” asked King Dro’Zel of Senchal, a newly appointed advisor to the court.

“That won’t be necessary, I won’t be gone a minute,” said Reman.

Miramor crouched in the same rushes he had hidden in nearly eight months before. Now the ground was hard and snow-covered, and the rushes slick with ice. Every slight movement he made issued forth a crunch. If it were not for the raucous songs of the combined Morrowind and Imperial army gathered around the bonfire, he would not have dared creep this close to the Emperor and his concubine. They were standing at the curve in the frozen creek below the bluff, surrounded by trees sparkling with ice.

Carefully, Miramor removed the dagger from its sheath. He had slightly exaggerated his abilities with a short blade to the Night Mother. True, he had used one to cut the throat of Prince Juilek, but the lad was not in any position to fight back at the time. Still, how difficult could it be to stab an old man with one eye? What sort of blade skill would such an easy assassination require?

His ideal moment presented itself before his eyes. The woman saw something deeper in the woods, an icicle of an unusual shape she said, and darted off to get it. The Emperor stayed behind, laughing. He turned to the face of the bluff to see his soldiers singing their song’s refrain, his back to his assassin. Miramor knew the moment had come. Mindful of the sound of his footfall on the icy ground, he stepped forward and struck. Very nearly.

Almost simultaneously, he was aware of a strong arm holding back his striking arm and another one punching a dagger into his throat. He could not scream. The Emperor, still looking up at the soldiers, never saw Miramor pulled back into the brush and a hand much more skilled than his slicing into his back, paralysing him.

His blood pooling out and already crystallising on the frozen ground, Miramor watched, dying, as the Emperor and his concubine returned to join the camp up on the bluff.

12 Sun’s Dusk, 2920
Mournhold, Morrowind

A gout of ever-erupting flames was all that remained of the central courtyard of Castle Mournhold, blasting skyward into the boiling clouds. A thick, tarry smoke rolled through the streets, igniting everything that was wood or paper on fire. Winged bat-like creatures harried the citizens from their hiding places out into the open, where they were met by the real army. The only thing that kept all of Mournhold from burning to the ground was the wet, sputtering blood of its people.

Mehrunes Dagon smiled as he surveyed the castle crumbling.

“To think I nearly didn’t come,” he said aloud, his voice booming over the chaos. “Imagine missing all this fun.”
His attention was arrested by a needle-thin shaft of light piercing through his black and red shadowed sky. He followed it to its source, two figures, a man and a woman standing on a hill above town. The man in the white robe he recognised immediately as Sotha Sil, the sorcerer who had talked all the Princes of Oblivion in that meaningless truce.

“If you’ve come for the Duke of Mournhold, he isn’t here,” laughed Mehrunes Dagon. “But you might find pieces of him the next time it rains.”

“Daedra, we cannot kill you,” said Almalexia, her face hard and resolute. “But that you will soon regret.”

With that, two living gods and a prince of Oblivion engaged in battle on the ruins of Mournhold.

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17 Sun’s Dusk, 2920
Tel Aruhn, Morrowind

“Night Mother,” said the guard. “Correspondence from your agent in the Imperial Palace.”

The Night Mother read the note carefully. The test had been a success: Miramor had been successfully detected and slain. The Emperor was in very unsafe hands. The Night Mother responded immediately.

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18 Sun’s Dusk, 2920
Balmora, Morrowind

Sotha Sil, face solemn and unreadable, greeted Vivec at the grand plaza in front of his palace. Vivec had ridden day and night after hearing about the battle in his tent in Bodrum, crossing mile after mile, cutting through the dangerous ground at Dagoth-Ur at blinding speed. To the south, during all the course of the journey, he could see the whirling red clouds and knew that the battle was continuing, day after day. In Gnisis, he met a messenger from Sotha Sil, asking him to meet at Balmora.

“Where is Almalexia?”

“Inside,” said South Sil wearily. There was a long, ugly gash running across his jaw. “She’s gravely injured, but Mehrunes Dagon will not return from Oblivion for many a moon.”

Almalexia lay on a bed of silk, tended to by Vivec’s own healers. Her face, even her lips, was grey as stone, and blood stained through the gauze of her bandages. Vivec took her cold hand. Almalexia’s mouth moved wordlessly. She was dreaming.

She was battling Mehrunes Dagon again amid a firestorm. All around her, the blackened husk of a castle crumbled, splashing sparks into the night sky. The Daedra’s claws dug into her belly, spreading poison through her veins while Almalexia throttled him. As she sank to the ground beside her defeated foe, she saw that the castle consumed by fire was not Castle Mournhold. It was the Imperial Palace.

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24 Sun’s Dusk, 2920
The Imperial City, Cyrodiil

A winter gale blew over the city, splashing the windows and glass domes of the Imperial Palace.
Quivering light rays illuminated the figures within in surreal patterns.

The Emperor barked orders to his staff in preparations for the banquet and ball. This was what he enjoyed best, more than battle. King Dro’Zel was supervising the entertainment, having strong opinions on the matter. The Emperor himself was arranging the details of the dinner. Roast nebfish, vegetable marrow, cream soups, buttered helerac, codsrumb, tongue in aspic. Potentate Versidue-Shaie had made a few suggestions of his own, but the tastes of the Akaviri were very peculiar.

The Lady Corda accompanied the Emperor to his chambers as night fell.
The winter morning sun glinted through the cobweb of frost on the window, and Almalexia opened
her eyes. An ancient healer mopped a wet cloth across her head, smiling with relief. Asleep in the
chair next to her bed was Vivec. The healer rushed to a side cabinet and returned with a flagon of
water.

“How are you feeling, goddess?” asked the healer.

“Like I’ve been asleep for a very long time,” said Almalexia.

“So you have. Fifteen days,” said the healer, and touched Vivec’s arm. “Master, wake up. She
speaks.”

Vivec rose with a start, and seeing Almalexia alive and awake, his face broke into a wide grin. He
kissed her forehead, and took her hand. At last, there was warmth again in her flesh.

Almalexia’s peaceful repose suddenly snapped: “Sotha Sil—”

“He’s alive and well,” replied Vivec. “Working on one of his machines again somewhere. He
would have stayed here too, but he realised he could do you more good working that peculiar
sorcery of his.”

The castellan appeared in the doorway. “Sorry to interrupt you, master, but I wanted to tell you that
your fastest messenger left late last night for the Imperial City.”

“Messenger?” asked Almalexia. “Vivec, what has happened?”

“I was to go and sign a truce with the Emperor on the sixth, so I sent him word that it had to be
postponed.”

“You can’t do me any good here,” said Almalexia, pulling herself up with effort. “But if you don’t
sign that truce, you’ll put Morrowind back to war, maybe for another eighty years. If you leave
today with an escort and hurry, perhaps you can get to the Imperial City only a day or two late.”
“Are you certain you don’t need me here?” asked Vivec.

“I know that Morrowind needs you more.”

6 Evening Star, 2920
The Imperial City, Cyrodiil

The Emperor Reman III sat on his throne, surveying the audience chamber. It was a spectacular sight: silver ribbons dangled from the rafters, burning cauldrons of sweet herbs simmered in every corner, Pyandonean swallowtails sweeping through the air, singing their songs. When the torches were lit and servants began fanning, the room would be transfigured into a shimmering fantasy land. He could smell the kitchen already, spices and roasts.

The Potentate Versidue-Shaie and his son Savirien-Chorak slithered into the room, both bedecked in the headdress and jewellery of the Tsaesci. There was no smile on their golden face, but there seldom was one. The Emperor still greeted his trusted advisor with enthusiasm.

“This ought to impress those savage Dark Elves,” he laughed. “When are they supposed to arrive?”

“A messenger’s just arrived from Vivec,” said the Potentate solemnly. “I think it would be best if Your Imperial Majesty met him alone.”

The Emperor lost his laughter, but nodded to his servants to withdraw. The door then opened and Lady Corda walked into the room, with a parchment in her hand. She shut the door behind her, but did not look up to meet the Emperor’s face.

“How long do you need?” asked Savirien-Chorak.

“Five minutes,” said Corda, wiping the blood from her hands. “If you can give me ten, though, I’ll be doubly grateful.”

“Very well,” said the Potentate to Corda’s back as she raced from the audience chamber. “She ought to be an Akaviri, the way the girl handles a blade is truly remarkable.”

“I must go and establish our alibi,” said Savirien-Chorak, disappearing behind one of the secret passages that only the Emperor’s most trusted knew about.

“Do you remember, close to a year ago, Your Imperial Majesty,” he Potentate smiled, looking down at the dying man, “when you told me to remember, ‘You Akaviri have a lot of showy moves, but if just one of our strikes come through, it’s all over for you.’ I remember that, you see.”

The Emperor spat up blood and somehow said the word: “Snake.”

“I am a snake, Your Imperial Majesty, inside and out. But I didn’t lie. There was a messenger from Vivec. It seems he’ll be a little late in arriving,” the Potentate shrugged before disappearing behind
the secret passage. “Don’t worry yourself, I’m sure the food won’t go bad.”

The Emperor of Tamriel died in a pool of his own blood in his empty audience chamber for a grand ball. He was found by his bodyguard fifteen minutes later. Corda was nowhere to be found.

8 Evening Star, 2920
Caer Suvio, Cyrodiil

Lord Glavius, apologising profusely for the quality of the road through the forest, was the first emissary to greet Vivec and his escort as they arrived. A string of burning globes decorated the leafless trees surrounding the villa, bobbing in the gentle but frigid night breeze. From within, Vivec could smell the simple feast and a high sad melody. It was a traditional Akaviri wintertide carol.

Potentate Versidue-Shaie greeted Vivec at the front door.

“I’m glad you received the message before you got all the way to the City,” said the Potentate, guiding his guest into the large, warm drawing room. “We are in a difficult transition time, and for the moment, it is best not to conduct our business at the capitol.”

“There is no heir?” asked Vivec.

“No official one, though there are distant cousins vying for the throne. While we sort the matter out, at least temporarily the nobles have decided that I may act in the office of my late master,” Versidue-Shaie signalled for the servants to draw two comfortable chairs in front of the fireplace. “Would you feel most comfortable if we signed the treaty officially right now, or would you like to eat something first?”

“You intend to honour the Emperor’s treaty?”

“I intend to honour everything as the Emperor,” said the Potentate.

14 Evening Star, 2920
Tel Aruhn, Morrowind

Corda, dusty from the road, flew into the Night Mother’s arms. For a moment, they stayed locked together, the Night Mother stroking her daughter’s hair, kissing her forehead. Finally, she reached into her sleeve and handed Corda a letter.

“What is it?” asked Corda.

“A letter from the Potentate, expressing his delight at your expertise,” replied the Night Mother. “He’s promised to send us payment, but I’ve already sent back a reply. The late Empress paid us enough for her husband’s death. Mephala would not have us greedy beyond our needs. You should not be paid twice for the same murder, so it is written.”

“He killed Rijja, my sister,” said Corda quietly.

“And so it should be that you struck the blow.”

“Where will I go now?”

“Whenever any of our holy workers becomes too famous to continue the crusade, we send them to
an island called Vounoura. It’s not more than a month’s voyage by boat, and I’ve arranged a
delightful estate for your sanctuary,” the Night Mother kissed the girl’s tears. “You meet many
friends there, and I know you will find peace and happiness at last, my child.”

19 Evening Star, 2920
Mournhold, Morrowind

Almalexia surveyed the rebuilding of the town. The spirit of the citizens was truly inspirational,
she thought, as she walked among the skeletons of new buildings standing in the blackened,
shattered remains of the old. Even the plant life showed a remarkable resilience. There was life yet
in the blasted remains of the comberry and roobrush shrubs that once lined the main avenue. She
could feel the pulse. Come springtide, green would bolt through the black.

The Duke’s heir, a lad of considerable intelligence and sturdy Dunmer courage, was coming down
from the north to take his father’s place. The land would do more than survive: it would strengthen
and expand. She saw the future much more strongly than she saw the present.

Of all the things she was most certain of, she knew that Mournhold was forever the home to at least
one goddess.

22 Evening Star, 2920
The Imperial City, Cyrodiil

“The Cyrodiil line is dead,” announced the Potentate to the crowd gathered beneath the Speaker’s
Balcony of the Imperial Palace, “but the Empire lives. The distant relatives of our beloved
Emperor have been judged unworthy of the throne by trusted nobility who advised His Imperial
Majesty throughout his long and illustrious reign. It has been decided that as an impartial and
faithful friend of Reman III, I will have the responsibility of continuing on in his name.”

The Akaviri paused, allowing his words to echo and translate into the ears of the populace. They
merely stared up at him in silence. The rain washed through the streets of the city, but the sun, for a
brief time, appeared to be offering a respite from the winter storms.

“I want to make it clear that I am not taking the title Emperor,” he continued. “I have been and will
continue to be Potentate Versidue-Shaie, an alien welcomed kindly to your shores. It will be my
duty to protect my adopted homeland, and I pledge to work tirelessly at this task until someone
more worthy takes the burden from me. As my first act, I declare that in commemoration of this
historical moment, beginning on the first of Morning Star, we will enter year one of the Second Era
as time will be reckoned. Thus, we mourn the loss of our Imperial family, and look forward to the
future.”

Only one man clapped at these words. King Dro’Zel of Senchal truly believed that this would be
the finest thing to happen to Tamriel in history. Of course, he was quite mad.

31 Evening Star, 2920
Ebonheart, Morrowind

In the smoky catacombs beneath the city where Sotha Sil forged the future with his arcane
clockwork apparatus, something unforeseen happened. An oily bubble seeped from a long trusted
gear and popped. Immediately, the wizard’s attention was drawn to it and to the chain that tiny
action triggered. A pipe shifted half an inch to the left. A tread skipped. A coil rewound itself and
began spinning in a counter direction. A piston that had been thrusting left-right, left-right, for
millennia suddenly began shifted right-left. Nothing broke, but everything changed.

“It cannot be fixed now,” said the sorcerer quietly.

He looked up through a crick in the ceiling into the night sky. It was midnight. The second era, the
age of chaos, had begun.

Chapter End Notes

You guys have no idea how happy I am to be finished with this blasted series.
Honestly, twelve-part series are too much. It was very interesting, though, so, yeah.

Anyway, I just wanna say that I've been getting a lot more feedback and hits than I
thought it would. I guess people like fictional books from a fictional world in a game
series. Who knew.
An Accounting of the Scrolls

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

An Accounting of the Scrolls
by Quintus Nerevelus, Former Imperial Librarian

After the supposed left of an Elder Scroll from our Imperial Library, I endeavoured to find any sort of index or catalogue of the Scrolls in our possession so that such situations may be avoided (or at least properly verified) in the future. To my dismay, I discovered that the Moth Priests are notoriously inexact when it comes to the actual physical manifestations of the Scrolls, and had no idea how many they held, or how they were organised. Merely asking the question evoked chuckles, as if a child was asking why don’t can’t talk.

I will confess, my jealousy of the ones who can read the Scrolls grows, but I am not yet willing to sacrifice my sight to alleged knowledge. The older Moth Priests I attempt to engage in conversation seem as batty as any other elder who has lost their mind, so I fail to see what wisdom is imparted from the reading.

In any case, I set out to create my own index of the Elder Scrolls, in cooperation with the monks. Day by day, we went through the tower halls, with them telling the general nature of each Elder Scroll so that I might record its location. Always careful never to glimpse the writings myself, I had only their word to go on. I meticulously drew out a map of the chambers, where Scrolls relating to certain specific prophecies were located, where particular periods of history were housed. In all, it took nearly a year of plodding, but at last I had rough notes on the entire library to begin my collation.

It was here that things began to go amiss. In studying my notes, I found many areas of overlap and outright contradiction. In some cases different monks would claim the same Scroll to be at opposite ends of the tower. I know they have no taste for jesting, or else I would suspect I was being made the fool in some game of theirs.

I spoke to one of the older monks to relate my concerns, and he hung his head in sorrow for my wasted time. “Did I not tell you,” he coughed, “when you started this that all efforts would be futile? The Scrolls do not exist in countable form.”

“I had thought you meant there were too many to be counted.”

“There are, but that is not the least of their complexities. Turn to the respiratory behind you, and tell me how many Scrolls are locked therein.”

I ran my fingers over the metal casings, tallying each rounded edge that they encountered. I turned back—“Fourteen,” I said.

“Hand me the eighth one,” he said, reaching out his hand.
I guided the cylinder into his palm, and he gave a slight nod of acknowledge it. “Now, count again.”

Humouring him, I again passed my hands over the Scrolls, but could not believe what I was feeling.

“Now… now there are eighteen!” I gasped.

The old monk chuckled, his cheeks pushing up his blindfold until it folded over itself. “And in fact,” he said, “there always were.”

It was then that I enrolled as the oldest novice ever accepted into the Cult of the Ancestor Moth.
Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for blood mention, death, a talking severed head, slavery, mentions of torture, mentions of body mutilations, mentions of drugs, mentions of child deaths, mentions of hunting children for sport, and mentions of children burning.

This book is fucked up. Read at your own risk. I've warned you what's inside.

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The Adabal-a

by Morihaus

Editor’s Note: The Adabal-a is traditionally believed to be the memoirs of Morihaus, consort to Alessia the Slave Queen. While this cannot be historically verified, the Adabal-a is certainly amongst the oldest written accounts to come down to us from the early First Era.

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PELINAL’S DEATH

And in the blood-floored throne room of White-Gold, the severed head of Pelinal spoke to the winged-bull, Morihaus, demigod lover of Al-Esh, saying, “Our enemies have undone me, and spread my body into hiding. In mockery of divine purpose, the Ayleids cut me into eighths, for they are obsessed with this number."

And Morihaus, confused, snorted through his ring, saying, “Your crusades went beyond her cousin, Whitestrake, but I am a bull, and therefore reckless in my wit. I would go and gore our prisoners if you had left any alive. You are blood-made-glorious, uncle, and will come again, as fox animal or light. Cyrod is still ours.”

Then Pelinal spoke again for the last time: “Beware, Morihaus, beware! With the foresight of death I know now that my foe yet lives, bitter knowledge to take to my grave. Better that I had died believing myself the victor. Although cast beyond the doors of night, he will return. Be vigilant! I can no longer shield the host of Men from Umaril’s retribution.”

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ALESSIA’S YOUTH DURING THE SLAVE YEARS

Perrif’s original tribe is unknown, but she grew up in Sard, anon Sardarvar Leed, where the Ayleids herded in men from across the Niben: kothri, nede, al-gemha, men-of-‘kreath (though these were later known to be imported from the North), keptu, men-of-ge (who were eventually destroyed when the Flower King Nilichi made great sacrifice to an insect god named [lost]), al-hared, men-of-ket, others; but this was Cyrod, the heart of the imperatum saliche, where men knew no freedom, even to keep family, or choice of name except in secret, and so to their alien masters all of these designations were irrelevant.

Men were given over to the lifting of stones, and the draining of the fields, and the upkeep of
temple and road; or to become art-tortures for strange pleasures, as in the wailing wheels of Vindasel and the gut-gardens of Sercen; and flesh-sculpture, which was everywhere among the slaves of the Ayleids in those days; or, worse, the realms of the Fire King Hadhuul, where the begetting of drugs drawn from the admixture of daedrons into living hosts let one inhale new visions of torment, and children were set aflame for nighttime tiger sport.

MORIHAUS EXPLAINS ALESSIA’S NAME

Then Morihaus said to them: “In your tales you have many names for her: Al-Esh, given to her in awe, that when translated sounds like a redundancy, ‘the high high’, from which come the more familiar corruptions: Aleshut, Esha, Alessia. You knew her as Paravant, given to her when first crowned, ‘first of its kind’, by which the gods meant a mortal worthy of the majesty that is the killing-questing-healing, which is also Paraval, Pevesh, Perrethu, Perrif, and, in my case, for it is what I called her when we were lovers: Paravania.”

“Though she is gone from me, she remains bathed in stars, first Empress, Lady of Heaven, Queen-ut-Cyrod.”

And they considered themselves full-answered, and departed.
Admonitions Against Ebony

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Admonition Against Ebony

A warning to any who might claim the Ebony Blade

To anyone reading this: BEWARE THIS BLADE

It is hoped that the only people having access to this room should be the Jarl of Whiterun and his trusted Wizard. If anyone else is reading this, please understand the magnitude of your folly, turn around, and never speak of this room or this blade to anyone.

It has corrupted and perverted the desires of great men and women. Yet its power is without equal—to kill while your victim smiles at you. Only a daedra most foul could have concocted such a malevolent and twisted weapon. But it appears that all who wield it end up with the crazed eyes of those wild men who roam the hills chattering with rabbits.

It is not to be trifled with. Not even the hottest fires of the Skyforge could melt it; indeed the coals themselves seemed to cool when it was placed within. We cannot destroy it, and we would not have it fall into the hands of our enemies. So we keep it, hidden, dark and deep within Dragonsreach, never to be used.

Woe be to any who choose to take it.
Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. I decided to skip 'Adonato’s Book' because it's the same as Olaf and the Dragon but with a few minor spelling mistakes, and I'm currently at school and UESP is blocked at school so I have to use the Elder Scrolls Wiki, and it doesn't have a page with its contents in, so...

Here's Advances in Lockpicking!

*Advances in Lockpicking*

*by Anonymous*

I am not a writer. I am a thief. I am a good thief. I'm not such a good writer. Anyway, I want to write about picking locks. I read a book about designing locks once. It was good. It gave me lots of ideas.

Some guys make locks with angled keyholes. Always carry around a bent lockpick. They will work good in these locks. I do, and I open lots of locks. Sometimes I carry around copper lockpicks. Copper bends easy. That way I can bend it right there. Copper lockpicks break easy too. Be careful.

Sometimes the locks have weird springs. They all spring differently, which makes picking it hard. I hold my torch close to the lock. This makes it hot. When it’s hot, the springs are all the same. They don't bounce so differently any more. Be careful not to burn yourself.

Some thieves can’t read. If you can’t read, get someone to read this book to you. It will make more sense then.
Adventurer's Journal

There’s something unsettling about these caravan attacks. I expected bandits, but the remains we saw were literally torn apart, rent limb from limb. Yet no mere animal could coordinate an attack on a full-sized merchant train. And wolves don’t take prisoners.

We’ve found a trail leading up into the hills. We’ll make camp here for the night, then set out at dawn. Whoever—whatever—murdered those people, we’ll make sure it never happens again.
Aedra and Daedra

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Aedra and Daedra

by Anonymous

The designations of Gods, Demons, Aedra, and Daedra, are universally confusing to the layman. They are often used interchangeably due to the arrogance or ignorance of the said user.

“Aedra” and “Daedra” are not relative terms. They are Elvish and exact. Azura is a Daedra in both Skyrim and Morrowind. “Aedra” is usually translated as “ancestor”, which is as close as Cyrodilic can come to this Elvish concept. “Daedra” means, roughly, “not our ancestors”. This distinction was crucial to the Dunmer, whose fundamental split in ideology is represented in their mythical genealogy.

Aedra are associated with status. Daedra represent change.

Aedra created the mortal world and are bound to the Earth Bones. Daedra, who cannot create, have the power to change.

As part of the divine contract of creation, the Aedra can be killed. Witness Lorkhan and the moons.

The protean Daedra, for whom the rules do not apply, can only be banished.
The Aetherium Wars

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

The Aetherium Wars

by Taron Dreth

Dedicated to Katria, my Friend and Colleague

The end, when it came, was swift. In the span of three short years, the great dwarven cities of Skyrim, from Markarth to the Velothi Mountains, fell before the armies of the High King. Cities that had held fast against the Nords for over a hundred years crumbled abruptly and without warning.

For centuries, scholars have marvelled at the sudden collapse of the Dwemer city-states. Even the Nords seem to have been taken by surprise, though their chroniclers were quick to ascribe their success to King Gellir’s inspired tactics and the blessings of Shor.

My research suggests a much different cause, however. In the decades preceding their fall, the dwarven cities of Skyrim had been decimated by internal disputes over a most surprising cause: Aetherium.

Modern scholars know Aetherium as a rare, luminescent blue crystal found in some Dwemer ruins. Most consider it little more than a curiosity, as it has proven all but impossible to work with: while it has a strong magical aura, it is alchemically inert, and no known process can enchant, smelt, bold, bind, or break it.

To the dwarves, of course, such problems were merely a challenge. In the years following King Harald’s reign, the Dwemer discovered a considerable source of Aetherium in their deepest delvings. An alliance of four cities, led by Arkngthamz, the great research centre in the southern Reach, was formed to oversee its extraction, processing, and study, and a new ‘Aetherium Forge’ constructed to smelt it under precisely controlled conditions.

If the inscriptions I discovered are to be believed, the results were nothing short of spectacular: the items produced by the Forge were artefacts of immense power, imbued from the moment of their creation with powerful enchantments. The dwarven alliance shattered almost immediately, as the four city-states and their rivals attempted to claim the Forge.

We can only speculate that none were successful. Decades of conflict merely weakened them all, allowing for King Gellir’s subsequent conquests. And though the Dwemer reclaimed most of their lands a century later, there is no evidence that they ever resumed their research on Aetherium. Perhaps the costs had just been too great.

But nothing like the Aetherium Forge described in the inscriptions has ever been found within the borders of Skyrim. It may have been destroyed long ago, by the Nord invaders or the Dwemer themselves. Or perhaps it, like the secrets of Aetherium itself, still remains to be discovered.
“Sit quietly, Child, and listen, for the story I tell is a story of the years.”

“But what is it, Grandfather? Is it a story of heroes and beasts?”

The Grandfather looked patiently at the Child. He was growing into a fine boy. Soon he would see the value in the stories, the lessons that were taught to each generation. “Just listen, Child. Let the story take root in your heart.”

In a time before now, long before now, when the Skaal were new, there was peace in the Land. The sun was hot and the crops grew long, and the people were happy in the peace that the All-Maker had given them. But, the Skaal grew complacent and lazy, and they took for granted the Land and all the gifts the All-Maker had given them. They forgot, or chose not to remember, that the Adversary was always watching, and that he delights in tormenting the All-Maker and his chosen people. And so it was that the Adversary came to be among the Skaal.

The Adversary has many aspects. He appears in the unholy beasts and the incurable plague. At the End of Seasons, we will know him as Thartaag the World-Devourer. But in these ages he came to be known as the Greedy Man.

The Greedy Man (that is what we call him, for to speak his name would certainly bring ruin on the people) lived among the Skaal for many months. Perhaps he was once just a man, but when the Adversary entered into him, he became the Greedy Man, and that is how he is remembered.

It came to be one day that the powers of the Skaal left them. The strength left the arms of the warriors, and the shaman could no longer summon the beasts to their side. The elders thought that surely the All-Maker was displeased, and some suggested that the All-Maker had left them forever. It was then that the Greedy Man appeared to them and spoke.

“You of the Skaal have grown fat and lazy. I have stolen the gifts of your All-Maker. I have stolen the Oceans, so you will forever know thirst. I have stolen the Lands and the Trees and the Sun, so your crops will wither and die. I have stolen the Beasts, so you will grow hungry. And I have stolen the Winds, so you will live without the Spirit of the All-Maker. And until one of you can reclaim these gifts, the Skaal will live in misery and despair. For I am the Greedy Man, and that is my nature.” And the Greedy Man disappeared.

The members of the Skaal spoke for many days and nights. They knew that one of them must retrieve the Gifts of the All-Maker, but they could not decide who it should be.
“I cannot go,” said the Elder, “for I must stay to lead the Skaal, and tell our people what is the law.”

“I cannot go,” said the Warrior, “for I must protect the Skaal. My sword will be needed in case the Greedy Man reappears.”

“I cannot go,” said the Shaman, “for the people need my wisdom. I must read the portents and offer my knowledge.”

It was then that a young man called Aevar lifted his voice. He was strong of arm, and fleet of foot, but he was not yet a warrior of the Skaal. “I will go,” said Aevar, and the Skaal laughed. “Hear me out,” the boy continued. “I am not yet a warrior, so my sword will not be needed. I cannot read the portents, so the people will not seek my counsel. And I am young, and not yet wise in the ways of the law. I will retrieve the Gifts of the All-Maker from the Greedy Man. If I cannot, I will not be missed.” The Skaal thought on this briefly, and decided to let Aevar go. He left the village the next morning to retrieve the Gifts.

Aevar first set out to retrieve the Gift of Water, so he travelled to the Water Stone. It was there that the All-Maker first spoke to him. “Travel west to the sea and follow the Swimmer to the Waters of Life.” So Aevar walked to the edge of the ocean, and there was the Swimmer, a Black Horker, sent from the All-Maker. The Swimmer dove into the waters and swam very far, and far again. Aevar was strong, though, and he swam hard. He followed the Swimmer to a cave, swimming deeper and deeper, his lungs burning and his limbs exhausted. At last, he found a pocket of air, and there, in the darkness, he found the Waters of Life. Gathering his strength, he took the Waters and swam back to the shore.

Upon returning to the Water Stone, the All-Maker spoke. “You have returned the Gift of Water to the Skaal. The Oceans again will bear fruit, and their thirst will be quenched.” Aevar then travelled to the Earth Stone, and there the All-Maker spoke to him again. “Enter the Cave of Hidden Music, and hear the Song of the Earth.”

So Aevar travelled north and east to the Cave of Hidden Music. He found himself in a large cavern, where the rocks hung from the ceiling and grew from the ground itself. He listened there, and heard the Song of the Earth, but it was faint. Grabbing up his mace, he struck the rocks of the floor in time with the Song, and the Song grew louder, until it filled the cavern and his heart. Then he returned to the Earth Stone.

“The Gift of the Earth is with the Skaal again,” said the All-Maker. “The Lands are rich again, and will bear life.” Aevar was tired, and the Sun burned him, the trees offered no shade, and there was no wind to cool him. Still, he travelled on to the Beast Rock, and the All-Maker spoke. “Find the Good Beast and ease his suffering.”

Aevar travelled through the woods of the Isinfier for many hours until he heard the cries of a bear from over a hill. As he crested a hill, he saw the bear, a Falmer’s arrow piercing its neck. He checked the woods for the Falmer (for that is what they were, though some say they are not), and finding none, approached the beast. He spoke soothing words and came upon it slowly, saying, “Good Beast, I mean you no harm. The All-Maker has sent me to ease your suffering.”

Hearing these words, the bear ceased his struggles, and laid his head at Aevar’s feet. Aevar grasped the arrow and pulled it from the bear’s neck. Using the little nature magic he knew, Aevar tended the wound, though it took the last bit of his strength. As the bear’s wound closed, Aevar slept.

When he awoke, the bear stood over him, and the remains of a number of Falmer were strewn
about. He knew that the Good Beast had protected him during the night. He travelled back to the Beast Rock, the bear by his side, and the All-Maker spoke to him again. “You have returned the Gift of the Beasts. Once again, the Good Beasts will feed the Skaal when they are hungry, clothe them when they are cold, and protect them in times of need.”

Aevar’s strength had returned, so he travelled to the Tree Stone, though the Good Beast did not follow him. When he arrived, the All-Maker spoke. “The First Trees are gone, and must be replanted. Find the seed and plant the First Tree.”

Aevar travelled again through the Hirstaang Forest, searching for the seeds of the First Tree, but he could find none. Then he spoke to the Tree Spirits, the living trees. They told him that the seeds had been stolen by one of the Falmer (for they are the servants of the Adversary), and this Falmer was hiding them deep in the forest, so that none would ever find them.

Aevar travelled to the deepest part of the forest, and there he found the evil Falmer, surrounded by the Lesser Tree Spirits. Aevar could see that the Spirits were in his thrall, that he had used the magic of the Seeds and spoken their secret name. Aevar knew he could not stand against such a force, and that he must retrieve the seeds in secret.

Aevar reached into his pouch and drew out his flint. Gathering leaves, he started a small fire outside the clearing where the Falmer and the ensorcelled Spirits milled. All the Skaal know the Spirits’ hatred of fires, for the fires ravage the trees they serve. At once, the Nature of the Spirits took hold, and they rushed to quell the flames. During the commotion, Aevar snuck behind the Falmer and snatched the pouch of Seeds, stealing away before the evil being knew they were gone.

When Aevar returned to the Tree Stone, he planted the tree in the ground, and the All-Maker spoke to him. “The Gift of Trees is restored. Once again, the Trees and Plants will bloom and grow, and provide nourishment and shade.” Aevar was tired, for the Sun would only burn, and the Winds would not yet cool him, but he rested briefly in the shade of the Trees. His legs were weary and his eyes heavy, but he continued on, travelling to the Sun Stone. Again, the All-Maker spoke. “The gentle warmth of the Sun is stolen, so not it only burns. Free the Sun from the Halls of Penumbra.”

And so Aevar walked west, over the frozen lands until he reached the Halls of Penumbra. The air inside was thick and heavy, and he could see no farther than the end of his arm. Still, he felt his way along the walls, though he heard the shuffling of feet and knew that this place held the Unholy Beasts who would tear his flesh and eat his bones. For hours he crept along, until he saw a faint glow far at the end of the hall.

There, from behind a sheet of perfect ice, came a glow so bright he had to shut his eyes, lest they be forever blinded. He plucked the flaming eye from one of the Unholy Beasts and threw it at the ice with all his might. A small crack appeared in the ice, then grew larger. Slowly, the light crept out between the cracks, widening them, splitting the ice wall into pieces. With a deafening crack, the wall crumbled, and the light rushed over Aevar and through the Halls. He heard the shrieks of the Unholy Beasts as they were blinded and burned. He ran out of the Halls, following the light, and collapsed on the ground outside.

When he was able to rise again, the Sun again warmed him, and he was glad of that. He travelled back to the Sun Stone, where the All-Maker spoke to him. “The Gift of the Sun is the Skaal’s once again. It will warm them and give them light.” Aevar had one final Gift he had to recover, the Gift of the Winds, so he travelled to the Wind Stone, far on the western coast of the island. When he arrived, the All-Maker spoke to him, giving him his final task. “Find the Greedy Man and release the Wind from its captivity.”

So, Aevar wandered the land in search of the Greedy Man. He looked in the trees, but the Greedy
Man did not hide there. Nor did he hide near the oceans, or the deep caves, and the beasts had not seen him in the dark forests. Finally, Aevar came to a crooked house, and he knew that ere he would find the Greedy Man. “Who are you,” shouted the Greedy Man, “that you would come to my house?”

“I am Aevar of the Skaal,” said Aevar. “I am not warrior, shaman, or elder. If I do not return, I will not be missed. But I have returned the Oceans and the Earth, the Trees, the Beasts, and the Sun, and I will return the Winds to my people, that we may feel the spirit of the All-Maker in our souls again.” And with that, he grabbed the Greedy Man’s bag and tore it open. The Winds rushed out with gale force, sweeping the Greedy Man up and carrying him off, far from the island. Aevar breathed in the Winds and was glad. He walked back to the Wind Stone, where the All-Maker spoke to him a final time.

“You have done well, Aevar. You, the least of the Skaal, have returned my gifts to them. The Greedy Man is gone for now, and should not trouble your people again in your lifetime. Your All-Maker is pleased. Go now, and live according to your Nature.” And Aevar started back to the Skaal Village.

“And then what happened, Grandfather?”

“What do you mean, Child? He went home.”

“No. When he returned to the village,” the Child continued. “Was he made a warrior? Or taught the ways of the shaman? Did he lead the Skaal in battle?”

“I do not know. That is where the story ends,” said the Grandfather.

“But that is not an ending! That is not how stories end!”

The old man laughed and got up from his chair.

“Is it not?”
Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for death, human sacrifice, slavery, and mind control.

Never thought I’d see the day we were run out of the Knifepoint Gang. Least the storm should cover our tracks. Vidgrod, Raen and I took shelter in a cave for the night. Looks like there’s an old ruin here. Least there are no Draugr around.

Vidgrod and Raen both want to set up here for a while, maybe do some raiding. They ought to know better—the road’s deserted, especially this time of year. Plenty of better places up north. But they seem awfully insistent about staying here. Wouldn’t even lend a hand when I went out to hunt tonight.

Something’s wrong. Raen hasn’t said a word since she woke up this morning, just keeps staring off into space. Vidgrod isn’t much better. They sick? Not like any illness I’ve heard of. I’d just walk out on them, but I can’t seem to get up the nerve. I feel like something’s holding me back. What is this place?

We’re not alone. I can hear him now. Someone, speaking in my mind. Old. Powerful. Halldir, that’s the name. He wants something from us. Needs us to stay for the magic to work. I tried to run, can’t. Just like them.

Raen jumped first. Onto the cairn. That’s what Master wants—blood, sacrifice, power to live again. His magic, I can feel it pulsing in my blood. He’s draining us. We’ll serve him soon, our bodies, our souls. Just like the others. They’re waiting. It’s my turn.
Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for mentions of sex and mentions of orgies.

The public manifesto of the Khajiit organisation Renrijra Krin.

This is an absurd book. But like all things Khajiiti, as the expression goes, “gzalzi vaberzarita maaszi”, or “absurdity has become necessity.” Much of what I have to say has probably never been written before, and if it has, no one has read it. The Imperials feel that everything must be written down for posterity, but every Khajiiti kitten born in Elsweyr knows his history, he drinks it in with his mother’s milk.

Fairly recently, however, our struggles to win back our homeland from the rapacious Count of Leyawiin have attracted sympathetic persons, even Imperials, who wish to join our cause, but, it seems, do not understand our ways. Our enemies, of course, do not understand us either, but that is as we wish it, a weapon in our arsenal. Our non-Khajiiti friends, however, should know who we are, why we are, and what we are doing.

The Khajiit mind is not engineered for self-reflection. We simply do what we do, and let the world be damned. To put into words and rationalise our philosophy is foreign, and I cannot guarantee that even after reading this, you will understand us. Grasp this simple truth—“q’zi no vano thzina ualizz”—“When I contradict myself, I am telling the truth.”

We are the Renrijra Krin. “The Mercenary’s Grin,” “The Laugh of the Landless,” and “The Smiling Scum,” would all be fair translations. It is a derogatory expression, but it is amusing so we have adopted it.

We have anger in our hearts, but not on our faces. We fight for Elsweyr, but we do not ally ourselves with the Mane, who symbolises our land. We believe in justice, but do not follow laws.

“Q’zi no vano thzina ualizz.”

These are not rules, for there is no word for “rules” in Ta’agra. Call them our “thjizzrini”—“foolish concepts.”

1. “Vaba Do’Shurh’do”: “It Is Good To Be Brave”

We are struggling against impossible odds, against the very Empire of Tamriel. Our cause is the noblest cause of all: defence of home. If we fail, we betray our past and our future. Our dead are “Ri’sallidad”, which may be interpreted as “martyrs” in the truest, best sense of that word which is so often misused. We honour their sacrifice and, beneath our smiles, mourn them deeply.
Our bravery most obviously shows in the smile that is the “Krin” part of our name. This does not mean that we walk about grinning like the idiotic baboonish Imga of Valenwood. We simply are entertained by adversary. We find an equal, fir fight tiresome in the extreme. We confidently smile because we know our victory in the end is assured. And we know our smiles drive our enemies insane.

2. “Vaba Maaszi Lhajiito”: “It Is Necessary To Run Away.”

We are struggling against impossible odds, against the very Empire of Tamriel. Honor is madness. Yes, we love the Renrijra Krin who died in battle against the forces of the Empire, but I guarantee you that each of those Ri’sallidad had an escape route he or she failed to use, and died saying, “Damn.”

When the great Senche-Raht comes to the Saimisil Steppes, he will find himself unable to hunt, unable to sleep, as the tiny Alfiq leap onto his back, biting him, and running off before he has a chance to turn his great body to face them. Eventually, though he may stubbornly hope to catch the Alfiq, the Senche-Raht always leaves. They are our cousins, the Alfiq, and we have adopted their strategy against the great tiger of Leyawiin.

Do not ally yourself with the Renrij if you yearn to be part of a mighty army, marching resolutely forward, for whom retreat is anathema. We will laugh at your suicidal idiocy as we slip into the reeds of the river, and watch the inevitable slaughter.

3. “Fusozay Var Var”: “Enjoy Life”

Life is short. If you have not made love recently, please, put down this book, and take care of that with all haste. Find a wanton lass or a frisky lad, or several, in whatever combination your wise loins direct, and do not under any circumstances play hard to get. Our struggles against the colossal forces of oppression can wait.

Good. Welcome back.

We Renrijra Krin live and fight together, and know that Leyawiin and the Empire will not give way very soon, likely not in our lifetimes. In the time we have, we do not want our closest comrades to be dour, dull, colourless, sober, and virginal. If we did, we would have joined the Emperor’s Blades.

Do not begrudge us our lewd jokes, our bawdy, drunken nights, our moonsugar. They are pleasures that Leyawiin denies us, and so we take our good humour very seriously.

4. “Fusozay Var Dar”: “Kill Without Qualm”

Life is short. Very short, as many have learned when they have crossed the Renrijra Krin.

We fight dirty. If an enemy is facing us, we might consider our options, and even slip away if his sword looks too big. If his back is to us, however, I personally favour knocking him down, and then jumping on his neck where the bones snap with a gratifying crunch. Of course, it is up to you and your personal style.

5. “Ahzirr Durrarriss”: We Give Freely To The People”

Let us not forget our purpose. We are fighting for our families, the Khajiiti driven from the rich, fertile shores of Lake Makapi and the River Malapi, where they and their ancestors lived since time immemorial. It is our battle, but their tragedy. We must show them, lest they are swayed by other rhetoric, that we are fighting for them.
The Mane, The Emperor, and The Count can give speeches, pass laws, and, living life in the open, explain their positions and philosophies to their people to stave off the inevitable revolution. Extralegal entities, such as the Renrijra Krin, must make our actions count for our words. This means more than fighting the good fight, and having a laugh at our befuddled adversaries. It means engaging and seducing the people. Ours is not a military war, it is a political war. If the people rise up against our oppressors, they will retreat, and we will win.

Give to these people, whenever possible, gold, moonsugar, and our strong arms, and though they hide, their hearts will be with us.

6. “Ahzirr Traajijazeri”: “We Justly Take By Force”

Let us not forget our purpose. We are thieves and thugs, smugglers and saboteurs. If we cannot take a farm, we burn it to the ground. If the Imperials garrisoned in a glorious ancient stronghold, beloved by our ancestors, will not yield, we tear the structure apart. If the only way to rescue the land from the Leyawiin misappropriation is to make uninhabitable by all, so be it.

We want our life and our home back as it was twenty years ago, but if that is not realistic, then we will accept a different simple, pragmatic goal. Revenge. With a smile.
Aicantar's Lab Journal

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for death.

Aicantar’s Lab Journal

Uncle Calcelmo got back from Mzinchaleft today. Lots of artefacts this trip. He even brought me something—a spider that didn’t completely shatter when the guards smashed it. He wants me to get it working again. My first big research project!

Spider Centurion Research, Week 1

I’ve reassembled the spider with spare parts from the museum. All the joints move, just not on their own. Uncle said the spider needed a ‘control crystal’ with the right ‘electroharmonic signature’. The Guards are looking for one now.

Spider Centurion Research, Week 2

After yesterday’s incident, I assembled a staff to hold the crystal. It actually works! When you use the staff, it creates a beacon of some kind, and the spider just walks on over to it. Better yet, it doesn’t attack everyone on sight now!

Spider Centurion Research, Week 3

Apparently it will still attack, just not on sight. During this morning’s experiment, one of the newer guards was startled and drew his sword, and he was dead before anyone could react. Did it actually detect hostile intent?

Spider Centurion Research, Week 4

Further testing confirms that the spider seems to detect the intent of its controller in some way. Last week, it tried to defend me from a threat. This week, I snapped at a guard who interrupted my latest test, and it lashed out at him. Fascinating!

Spider Centurion Research, Week 5

No one appreciates my work. Uncle Calcelmo is buried in his Falmer research, and doesn’t have time to help me with the spider anymore. The guards are all afraid of it. I keep telling them that it’s harmless as long as I keep it under control, but there have been too many incidents. They just don’t believe me. I wanted to show the Jarl, but I can’t seem to get the spider to leave the lab—it looks like its control crystal only works up here. Maybe if I can reattune the enchantment…?
Coming to this area was a brilliant decision! The local flora seem to have many useful properties that I’ve been able to utilise into new potions! Outside, the rich soil has allowed the cuttings I’ve collected to grow into fine and bountiful plants! This afternoon, I think I will journey out for more mushrooms, as my current supply is beginning to dwindle.

On a personal note, I have moved my alchemy work outside the shack. I find the midday air is a boon to my health, as well as inspirational to my work.
Thanks for reading and reviewing.

This is actually by the same alchemist in the previous chapter. What happens to him is that he ends up dead in Evergreen Grove. So. Didn't exactly go well for him. If you want to start at the beginning of his journey, the first journal is in Alchemist's shack.

Also, this is extremely short. Oh well.

Setting up camp near this mushroom grove. Interested in seeing what exactly is causing their enhanced growth in this area. Today I’ll be heading out to see what kind of affect the mushrooms, and nearby Nirnroot, are having on the ecosystem downstream.
Alduin is Real

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for horrible spelling and grammar (I couldn't stop cringing when I copied it), and the reminder of what happened to Martin Septim.

Alduin is real, and he ent Akatosh!

by Thromgar Iron-Head

As my da used to say—Imperials are idiutts!

That is why I am riting this book. I ent never rote a book before, and I do not reckon to rite one agenn, but sometimes a man must do what a man must do. And what I must do is set the record strate about the god called Akatosh and the dragon called Alduin. They ent the same thing, no matter what them Imperials mite say, or how they mite wish it to be so.

My da was never one for the gods, but my mother was. She wershipped all the Divines, and tot me a lot of things. So I noe a thing or two about Akatosh. Just as much as any Imperial. I noe he was the first of all the gods to take shape in the Beginning Place. And I noe he has the shape of a dragon.

My da even told me the story of Martin Septim, and the things what happened when the gates to Oblivion opened. Septim turned into the Spirit of Akatosh and killed Mehrunes Dagon. Now I don't noe about you, but any dragon that fites the Prince of Destruction is okay by me.

Now I hope you understand the problim. Akatosh is good. Everyone, from Nord to Imperial noes that. But Alduin? He ent good! He’s the oposit of good! That Alduin is evil thrue and thrue. So you see, Akatosh and Alduin cant be one and the same.

Growing up as a lad in Skyrim, I herd all the stories. Told to me by my da, who was told by his da, who was told by his da, and so on. And one of those stories was about Alduin. But see, he was not Akatosh. He was another dragon and a real wun at that.

Akatosh is some kind of spirit dragon I think, wen he bothers to be a dragon at all (and not a god livin in sum kind of god plac like Oblivion). But Alduin is a real dragon, with flesh and teeth and a mean streak longer than the White River. And there was a time when Alduin tried to rool over all of Skyrim with his other dragons. In the end, it took sum mitey strong heroes to finally kill Alduin and be dun with his holy sorry story. So I got to ask—does that sound like Akatosh to you? No, friend. No it does not.

And so I, Thromgar Iron-Head do firmly say, with the utmost connvicshun, that Alduin is real, and he ent Akatosh!
As high priest of the Akatosh Chantry, I have dedicated my life to the service of the Great Dragon. He who was first at the Beginning. He who is greatest and most powerful of the Divines. He who is the very embodiment of infinity.

I am, quite obviously, a man of deep and unwavering faith. But not blind faith, for I am also a man of scholarly endeavours, and have always valued education and the pursuit of truth, in all its forms. And so, I have had the honour and privilege of making it my life’s work to discover the truth about Akatosh, in all our beloved Divine’s incarnations.

Throughout the civilised world (and I refer not only to the Empire, but to every nation on great Nirn that has embraced the virtues of learning and letters), the Great Dragon is worshipped. Usually, the highest of Divines is referred to as Akatosh. But what some may not be aware of is that he is occasionally referred to by two other names as well.

The Aldmer refer to Akatosh as Auri-El. The Nords call him Alduin. These names come up repeatedly in certain ancient texts, and in each one, it is clear that the deity in question is none other than he whom we call Akatosh.

Yet there are those that believe, even in this enlightened age, that this is not so. That the regional interpretations of Akatosh are not interpretations of Akatosh at all. Rather, they are references to altogether different deities, deities who may or may not share the same aspects or be the Great Dragon at all.

Many Altmer of Summerset Isle worship Auri-El, who is the soul of Anui-El, who in turn is the soul of Anu the Everything. But if you ask the high elves themselves (as I did, when I travelled to Summerset Isle to continue my research), the majority will concede that Auri-El is but Akatosh with a different name, coloured by their own cultural beliefs.

So maybe it comes as no surprise that the real theological dissension lies in Skyrim, among the Nord people—renowned as much for their stubbornness as they are their hardness and prowess on the fields of valour. When I journeyed to the stark white province, I was surprised to find a people whose views on Akatosh are almost diametrically opposed to those of the Altmer. The majority of Nord people seem to believe that their Alduin of legend is not Akatosh, but another deity entirely. A great dragon, yes, but not the Great Dragon.

Determined to get to the heart of the matter, I consulted with several Nords, chiefs among them an old and respected clan chief by the name of Bjorn Much-Blooded. And what surprised me most about those I talked to was not that they believed in Alduin instead of Akatosh, but that they recognised Alduin in addition to Akatosh. In fact, most children of Skyrim seem to view Akatosh in
much the same way I do—he is, in fact, the Great Dragon. First among the Divines, perseverance personified and, more than anything, a source of supreme good in the world.

Alduin, they claim, is something altogether different.

Whether or not he is actually a deity remains in question, but the Alduin of Nord folklore is in fact a dragon, but one so ancient, and so powerful, he was dubbed the “World Eater”, and some accounts even have him devouring the souls of the dead to maintain his own power. Other stories revolve around Alduin acting as some sort of dragon king, uniting the other dragons in a war against mankind, until he was eventually defeated at the hands of one or more brave heroes.

It is hard to deny that such legends are compelling. But as both High Priest and scholar, I am forced to ask the most important of questions—where is the evidence?

The Nords of Skyrim place a high value on their oral traditions, but such is the core of their unreliability. A rumour passed around the Wayrest market square can change so dramatically in the course of a few simple hours, that by the end of the day, one might believe half the city’s residents were involved in a number of scandalous activities. How then is an educated, enlightened person supposed to believe a legend that has been passed down, by word of mouth only, for hundreds, or even thousands of years?

The answer to such a question is simple—he cannot.

And so, it is my conclusion that the Alduin of Nord legend is Akatosh, whose story grew twisted and deformed through centuries of retelling and embellishment. Through no real fault of their own, the primitive peoples of Skyrim failed to understand the goodness and greatness of the Great Dragon, and it was this lack of understanding that formed the basis of what became, ironically, their most impressive creative achievement—“Alduin,” the World Eater, phantom of bedtime stories and justifications of ancient (if imagined) deeds.
Alva's Journal

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for death, child death, and burning.

Alva’s Journal

My life is dreary. Where is my prince come to rescue me? Where is my bold Nord warrior to sweep me off my feet?

I met a man today while picking nightflowers. He is exciting and exotic. We kissed in the moonlight. It was so romantic. I’m going to see him again tonight.

Now I understand the true colours of night. Movarth has shown me the true black of night and the true red of blood. He has promised me a feast of blood if I do his bidding in Morthal.

Hroggar was easy to seduce. Movarth said I should find a protector first, someone to watch over my coffin during the day. Hroggar is perfect.

Laelette came to visit me tonight. She slaked my thirst. I’ve hidden her away to let her rise as my handmaiden. I’ve spread the rumour in town that she left to join the war. Fools.

Movarth has confided his grand plan to me. I am to seduce the guardsman one at a time and make them my slaves. Then he and the others from the coven can descend upon Morthal and take the entire town. We won’t kill them. They will become our cattle for our thirst. An endless supply of blood and an entire town to protect us from the cursed sun.

Hroggar’s family is becoming inconvenient. I’ve told Laelette to kill them all, but make it look like an accident. Hroggar must be seen as innocent if he is going to be my protector.

That little fool! Laelette burned Hroggar’s family alive. I asked for an accident and she gave me a scandal. To make matters worse, she tried to turn his little girl, Helgi. Except Laelette couldn’t even get that right. She killed the child and left the body to burn.

Something is wrong with Laelette. She keeps talking about Helgi. I think her mind has snapped. She seems to think that the child can still be brought back to be her companion.

There is a stranger in town, looking into the fire. I’ll have to be careful.
Amongst the Draugr

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Amongst the Draugr

by Bernadette Bantien, College of Winterhold

It wasn’t until my seventh month with the creatures that they seemed to accept me. Well, “accept” isn’t really the proper word, but they seem to have decided that I posed no threat to them and gradually ceased their attacks. Though more than capable of fending them off (a combination of fire and turning spells are generally sufficient), I admit that I tired of having to be ever vigilant in their presence.

I’ll never know whether there was some sort of agreement communicated among them, for the only utterances they make seem to be in that heathen tongue that I can’t even pronounce, much less transcribe. In time, I learned more of their intentions toward me from their general movements and tones rather than specific words. Hostility in any creature is easily read, but in these peculiar of the living dead, with such variations in gait and speed, what amounts to a hostile charge in one may simply be casual movement to another. The eyes seem to be the key to their intent, and I will confess to more than one dream haunted by the glowing pinpoints in the darkness.

I had always wondered why the ancient priests of the dragon cult insisted that their followers be buried with them. It seems the height of pagan vanity to drag your conscripts to their death along with you, but as I integrated into their presence, I began to observe the reasons. Every day, a different set of draugr would awaken, shamble their way to the sarcophagus of their priest, and prostrate themselves before it. Several hours of this, followed by a meticulous cleaning of the area. It would appear that the adherents of the dragon priest continue their worship of him in death, which would also explain the ferocity with which they defend his chambers.

It took several weeks before I felt comfortable approaching the dragon priest’s resting place, myself. Inch by inch, until the snarling draugrs around me seemed to tire of fending off my timid presence. I was able to set some simple scrying spells around the tomb, that I might get a sense of what magical energies resided there. When the next group of draugr came to pay homage to the priest, I noted a sort of transferal happening. A distinct flow of life force between the adherents and the master.

It was here that I finally understood the dragon cult’s notion of resurrection. The second eternal life was only promised to those who ascended to the priesthood, but the lesser functionaries contributed their life force to sustaining them for eternity. I don’t know what sort of eternal wellspring they draw from, but it’s clear that each draugr carries only the barest whisper of life in it, and rekindles nightly while resting in its niche. I now believe that the grotesque forms that we see in the barrows were, in fact, buried fully as men and women, and only over the thousands of years that have passed withered into the wretched things we know. If we had visited a barrow directly after its construction, we might not even have known any of its inhabitants were dead!

These discoveries and extrapolations excite me, and my mind aches to return to the barrows. I have
only paused here at the College to transcribe these notes and gather further supplies for a more extended stay. My new hope is to learn some rudimentary way of speaking to them, for imagining what they could tell us of the early mists of time is staggering.
The Amulet of Kings

In the first years of the First Era, a powerful race of Elves called Ayleids, or the Heartland High Elves, ruled central Tamriel with an iron hand. The high and haughty Ayleids relied on their patrons, the treacherous Daedra Lords, to provide armies of daedra and dead spirits; with these fearless magical armies, the Ayleids preyed without mercy upon the young races of men, slaughtering or enslaving them at their whim.

On behalf of the suffering human races, St. Alessia, the first in the line of Cyrodiils, sought the aid of Akatosh, the Dragon God of Time, and ruler of the noble Aedra. Akatosh, looking with pity upon the plight of men, drew precious blood from his own heart, and blessed St. Alessia with this blood of Dragons, and made a Covenant that so long as Alessia’s generations were true to the dragon blood, Akatosh would endeavour to seal tight the Gates of Oblivion, and to deny the armies of daedra and undead to their enemies, the Daedra-loving Ayleids.

In token of this Covenant, Akatosh gave to Alessia and her descendants the Amulet of Kings and the Eternal Dragonfires of the Imperial City. This does Alessia become the first gem in the Cyrodiilic Amulet of Kings. The gem is the Red Diamond in the middle of the Amulet. This is the symbol of the Empire and later taken as the symbol of the Septim line. It is surrounded by either other gems, one for each of the Divines.

So long as the Empire shall maintain its worship of Akatosh and its kin, and so long as Alessia’s heirs shall bear the Amulet of Kings, Akatosh and his divine kin maintain a strong barrier between Tamriel and Oblivion, so that mortal man need never again fear the devastating summoned hosts of the Daedra Lords.

But if the Empire should slacken in its dedication to the Nine Divines, or if the blood of Alessia’s heirs should fail, then shall the barriers between Tamriel and the Daedric realms fall, and Daedra-worshippers might summon lesser Daedra and undead spirits to trouble the races of man.
Ancestors and the Dunmer

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for cannibalism, ghosts, rituals, and death.

Ancestors and the Dunmer

by Anonymous

Ghosts Walk Among Them

The departed spirits of the Dunmeri, and perhaps those of all races, persist after death. The knowledge and power of departed ancestors benefits the bloodlines of the Dunmeri Houses. The bond between the living family members and immortal ancestors is partly blood, partly ritual, partly volitional. A member brought into the House through marriage binds himself through ritual and oath into the clan, and gains communication and benefits from the clan’s ancestors; however, his access to the ancestors is less than his offsprings, and he retains some access to the ancestors of his own bloodline.

The Family Shrine

Each residence has a family shrine. In poorer homes, it may be nothing more than a hearth or alcove where family relics are displayed and venerated. In wealthy homes, a room is set aside for the use of ancestors. This shrine is called the Waiting Door, and represents the door to Oblivion.

Here the family members pay their respects through sacrifice and prayer, through oaths sworn upon duties, and through reports on the affairs of the family. In return, the family may receive information, training, and blessings from the family’s ancestors. The ancestors are thus the protectors of the home, and especially the precincts of the Waiting Door.

The Ghost Fence

It is a family’s most solemn duty to make sure their ancestor’s remains are interred properly in a City of the Dead such as a Necrom. Here the spirits draw comfort from one another against the chill of the mortal world. However, as a sign of great honour and sacrifice, an ancestor may grant that part of the remains be retained to serve as part of a ghost fence protecting the clan’s shrine and family precincts. Such an arrangement is often part of the family member’s free will, that a knucklebone shall be saved out of his remains and incorporated with solemn magic and ceremony into a clan ghost fence. In more exceptional cases, an entire skeleton or even a preserved corpse may be bound into a ghost fence.

These remains become a beacon and focus for ancestral spirits, and for the spirit of the remains in particular. The more remains used to make a ghost fence, the more powerful the fence is. And the most powerful mortals in life have the most powerful remains.
The Great Ghost Fence created by the Tribunal to hold back the Blight incorporates the bones of many heroes of the Temple and of the Houses Indoril and Redoran who dedicated their spirits to the Temple and Clan as their surrogate families. The Ghost Fence also contains bones taken from the Catacombs of Necrom and the many battlefields of Morrowind.

The Mortal Chill

Spirits do not like to visit the mortal world, and they do so only out of duty and obligation. Spirits tell us that the otherworld is more pleasant, or at least more comfortable for spirits than our real world, which is cold, bitter, and full of pain and loss.

Mad Spirits

Spirits that are forced to remain in our world against their will may become mad spirits, or ghosts. Some spirits are bound to this world because of some terrible circumstances of their death, or because of some powerful emotional bond to a person, place, or thing. These are called hauntings.

Some spirits are captured and bound to enchanted items by wizards. If the binding is involuntary, the spirit usually goes mad. A willing spirit may or may not retain its sanity, depending on the strength of the spirit and the wisdom of the enchanter.

Some spirits are bound against their will to protect family shrines. This unpleasant fate is reserved for those who have not served the family faithfully in life. Dutiful and honourable ancestral spirits often aid in the capture and binding of wayward spirits.

These spirits usually go mad, and make terrifying guardians. They are ritually prevented from harming mortals of their clans, but that does not necessary discharge them from mischievous or peevish behaviour. They are exceedingly dangerous for intruders. At the same time, if an intruder can penetrate the spirit’s madness and play upon the spirit’s resentment of his own clan, the angry spirits may be manipulated.

Oblivion

The existence of Oblivion is acknowledged by all Tamriel cultures, but there is little agreement on the nature of that otherworld, other than it is the place where the Aedra and Daedra live, and that communication and travel are possible between this world and Oblivion through magic and ritual.

The Dunmer do not emphasise the distinction between this world and Oblivion as do the human cultures of Tamriel. They regard our world and the otherworld as a whole with many paths from one end to the other rather than two separate worlds of different natures with distinct borders. This philosophical viewpoint may account for the greater affinity of elves for magic and its practices.

Foreign Views of Dunmeri Ancestor Worship and Spirit Magic

The Altmeri and Bosmeri also venerate their ancestors, but only by respecting the orderly and blissful passage of these spirits from this world to the next. That is, wood elves and high elves believe it is cruel and unnatural to encourage the spirits of the dead to linger in our world. Even more grotesque and repugnant is the display of the bodily remains of ancestors in ghost fences and ash pits. The presentation of fingerbones in a family shrine, for example, is sacrilegious to the Bosmer (who eat their dead) and barbaric to the Altmer (who inter their dead).
The human cultures of Tamriel are ignorant and fearful of dark elves and their culture, considering them to be inhumane and evil, like orcs and argonians, but more sophisticated. The human populations of Tamriel associate Dunmeri ancestor worship and spirit magic with necromancy; in fact, this association of the dark elves with necromancy is at least partly responsible for the dark reputation of Dunmer throughout Tamriel. This is generally an ignorant misconception, for necromancy outside the acceptable clan rituals is a most abhorrent abomination in the eyes of the Dunmer.

The dark elves would never think of practicing sorcerous necromancy upon any dark elf or upon the remains of any elf. However, dark elves consider the human and orcish races to be little more than animals. There is no injunction against necromancy upon such remains, or on the remains of any animal, bird, or reptile.

Imperial Policy officially recognises the practices of Dunmeri ancestor veneration and spirit magic as a religion, and protects their freedom to pursue such practices so long as they do not threaten the security of the Empire. Privately, most Imperial officials and traders believe dark elf ancestor worship and displays of remains are barbaric or even necromantic.

Telvanni “Necromancy”

The Telvanni are adept masters of necromancy. They do not, however, practice necromancy upon the remains of dark elves. Sane Telvanni regard such practices with loathing and righteous anger. They do practice necromancy upon the remains of animals and the remains of humans, orcs, and argonians—who are technically no more than animals in Morrowind.

Publisher’s Note

This book was written by an unknown scholar as a guide for foreign visitors to Morrowind shortly after the Armistice was signed. Many of these practices have since fallen into disfavour. The most obvious changes are those regarding the practice of Necromancy and the Great Ghostfence. Dunmer today regard Necromancy upon any of the accepted races as an abomination. The Ghostfence has forced many changes in the practice of ancestor worship. With the vast majority of ancestors’ remains going to strengthen the Great Ghostfence around the mountain of Dagoth Ur, there are very few clan ghost fences in Morrowind. The Temple discourages such practices among the Houses as selfish. The upkeep of family tombs and private Waiting Doors has fallen into disfavour, as very few remains have been buried in these tombs and shrines since the Armistice. In recent years most Dunmer venerate a small portion of their ancestor’s remains kept at a local temple.
Scribe’s Note: I have faithfully copied the following from the Annals of the Dragonguard of Sky Haven Temple for the years 2800-2819 (4329-4338 in the Old Calendar), Brother Annulus, 2E 568.

1E 2801: Emperor Kastav again ordered the Dragonguard to seize hostages from Markarth and Hroldan to ensure that the jarls meet their conscription quotas. Our Master’s official protest was denied, as usual. This will make relations with the local populace more difficult, although the “hostages” are in fact housed and trained with the other acolytes.

2804: Upon the outbreak of the Winterhold Rebellion, our Master refused orders to send the Dragonguard out to help suppress the rebellion. The Emperor ordered our supplies cut off, but we have made arrangements with local Reachmen and are efficiently self-sufficient. The Grandmaster supports our Master’s action on the grounds that it violates the Oath of Allegiance.

2805: The Temple is besieged. The fool Kalien was sent to Winterhold and sacked the city. There was a reason he was denied entry into the Dragonguard. But the local people do not count the difference between Akaviri. All our years building up trust with people of Skyrim are now for nought.

2806: We learned of the ascension of Reman II (of blessed name) when the siege of the Temple was lifted. We provided the honour guard for the Emperor’s first visit to Skyrim, a great boost to the Temple’s prestige.

2809: We received reports of a dragon in the east. Scouts were sent immediately, and signs of it were discovered, but it fled at our approach. The survivors have grown weary indeed.

2812: We finally received permission from the Emperor to begin construction of Alduin’s Wall. Craftsmen from Temples across the Empire have arrived and begun the great work, overseen by our own Master, as is only fitting, as she is unmatched in her dragonlore.

2813: Work on Alduin’s Wall progresses. The Master dismissed several craftsmen (from a western Temple that I do not need to name, they are so well known for their stiff-necked pride), which has delayed the work, but there must be no compromise. Alduin’s Wall is our gift to those that come after us.

2815: The Grandmaster visited the Temple in the summer to view the progress of the Wall. He has received complaints about the expense (there is no doubt where these originate), but he was so impressed by the wall even in its half-finished state that he gave our Master a Writ of Requisition
under the Emperor’s seal. There will be no more delays!

Further reports of dragons in the east which could not be verified.

2818: An auspicious year. Alduin’s Wall was finished, a dragon was located and slain, and Emperor Reman II visited to officially dedicate the Wall. The Blood Seal was consecrated in the presence of all the Dragonguard of Skyrim, a great honour with which few Temples can boast.
Antecedents of Dwemer Law

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for slavery, death, and revenge killing.

Antecedents of Dwemer Law

by Anonymous

In short, so far as I am able to trace the order of development in the customs of the Bosmeri tribes, I believe it to have been in all ways comparable to the growth of Altmeri law. The earlier liability for slaves and animals was mainly confined to surrender, which, as in Summerset Isles, later became compensation.

And what does this matter for a study of our laws today? So far as the concerns of the Altmeri law upon our own, especially the Altmeri law of master and servant, the evidence of it is to be found in every judgement which has been recorded for the last five hundred years. It has been stated already that we still repeat the reasoning of the Altmeri magistrates, empty as it is, to the present day. And I will quickly show how Altmeri custom can be followed into the courts of the Dwemer.

In the laws of Karndar Watch (P.D. 1180) it is said, “If one is owned by another slays one who owns himself, the owner must pay the associates three fine instruments and the body of the one who his owned.” There are many other similar citations. And the same principle is extended even to the case of a centurion by which a man is killed. “If, at the common workbench, one is slain by an Animunculi, the associates of the slain may disassemble the Animunculi and take its parts within thirty days.”

It is instructive to compare what Dhark has mentioned concerning the rude beasts of the Tenmar forests. “If a marsh cat was killed by an Argonian, his family were in disgrace till they retaliated by killing the Argonian, or another like it; but further, if a marsh cat was killed by a fall from a tree, his relatives would take their revenge by toppling the tree, and shattering its branches, and casting them to every part of the forest.”
The Apprentice's Assistant

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

The Apprentice’s Assistant

by Aramril

Advice from Valenwood’s most prestigious spellcaster

No doubt you have heard tales of my adventures. Stories carried from province to province, all of Tamriel in awe of my feats of magical prowess. More than once, I am sure, you have thought “if only I had Aramril’s ability. Then I too could seek fame and fortune in magic duels!”

It is true, of course. Great fame and limitless fortune awaits those who are successful. But to be successful, one needs to learn from the best. That is why you have purchased this book, so that I may teach you. I am, of course, the best.

Here, then, is my advice. Follow it, and you too can make a name for yourself throughout Tamriel.

1. To know your opponent is to know his weakness.

Infinitely more versatile than a simple blade of steel, a good mage has a wide array of spells at her disposal. More than that, she knows when to best use them. She knows that frost spells can stop a charging beast, or keep a savage brute from swinging his sword. She knows that shock spells can drain her opponent’s magicka. She knows that illusion spells can set a group of enemies against each other (should she find herself in a less-than-fair fight, an all-too-common reality when her opponents know they cannot win in single combat) and that there are spells that can save her in a moment when all seems lost.

2. To know yourself is to know your limits.

Even the best mage has a finite reserve of magicka; none born yet have been graced with Magnus’ infinite reserves of power. And so a good mage does not over-extend herself. She makes sure she always has enough magicka to keep herself safe. Failing that, she makes sure she has a sizeable supply of potions at the ready. Failing that, she makes sure she always has an escape route. Not that the Great Aramril has ever fled a fight, but of course you do not necessarily share her superb natural ability. That is why you must practice.

3. Wards can kill (you)

There is no question that wards are an essential tool of any aspiring mage. They can block incoming spells, negating your opponent’s attack and wasting his magicka. A good mage knows, however, to not rely too heavily on her ward. Keeping a ward readied for too long will leave a caster drained of magicka, unable to retaliate, and at worst unable to maintain the ward and therefore completely defenceless.
4. Two hands are not always better than one.

Any advanced spellcaster has learned to cast spells with both hands, dealing more damage. There are certain times when this is to your advantage, such as when your opponent is already weakened, or when it is likely to draw a bigger reaction from the crowd that has no doubt gathered to watch you. It is not always the best strategy, however. Concentration spells, for example, can often be used on the ground when an opponent is particularly nimble. In that instance, using both hands independently can cover more ground at the same time. A mage throwing fireballs with both hands cannot immediately raise a ward to defend herself, or heal while she continues to attack.

5. Always rise to a challenge, especially when you know you can win.

Remember that your first priority is, of course, to stay alive. Following closely behind, though, is your need to please the crowd. You are, after all, depending on their generosity to fund your adventures. Here, then, more than magic comes into play. If you can gain a sense of your opponent’s ability before the duel begins, you can enter into the event with confidence. Knowing that you outclass your opponent is of great importance, as it means you can confidently give the crowd a better show. Likewise, knowing ahead of time that you could very well lose a duel, you are afforded an opportunity to suddenly find yourself engaged elsewhere, and be unable to attend the event. (By no means do I suggest that I have ever done such a thing; I simply find that my great fame occasionally means that I am unable to respond to every single request for a duel)

Keep these few things in mind, keep your wits about you, and you too can make a name for yourself by putting on great displays of magical prowess. Take care, though—for if you become successful enough, you may find yourself facing a challenge from me!
FORM THE FIRST: Makest thou the Mana Fountain to be Primed with Pure Gold, for from Our Gold only may the Humours be rectified, and the Pure Principles coaxed from the chaos of Pure Power. Droppest thou then the Pure Gold upon the surface of the Mana Fountain. Takest thou exceeding care to safeguard yourself from the insalubrious tempests of the Mana Fountain, for through such Assaults may one’s heath be utterly Blighted.

FORM THE SECOND: Make sure that thou harvest with you this Excellent Manual, so that thou might speak the necessary Words straightaway, and without error, so that thou not in carelessness cause thyself and much else to discorporate and disorder the World with your component humours.

FORM THE THIRD: Take in hand the item to be Restored, and hold it forth within the Primed Fountain, murmuring all the while the appropriate phrases, which are to be learned most expeditiously and faultlessly from this Manual, and this Manual alone, notwithstanding the vile calumnies of Kharneson and Rattor, whose bowels are consumed by envy of my great learning, and who do falsely give testament to the efficacies of their own Manuals, which are in every way inferior and steeped in error.

FORM THE FOURTH: Proceed instantly to Heal thyself of all injuries, or to avail yourself of the Healing powers of the Temples and Healers, for though the agonies manacaust myst be borne by any who would Restore a prized Arcana to full Potency, yet it is not wise that suffering be endured unduly, nor does the suffering in any way render the Potency more Sublime, notwithstanding the foolish speculations of Kharneson and Rattor, whose faults and wickednesses are manifest even to the least learned of critics.
The Arcturian Heresy

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for death, assassinations, and betrayal.

The Arcturian Heresy

by Underking, Ysmir Kingmaker

With his god destroyed, Wulfharth finds it hard to keep his form. He staggers out of Red Mountain to the battlefield beyond. The world has shaken and all of Morrowind is made of fire. A strong gale picks up, and blows his ashes back to Skyrim.

Wulfharth adopts and is adopted by the Nords then. Ysmir the Grey Wind, the Storm of Kyne. But through Lorkhan he lost his national identity. All he wants the Nords for is to kill the Tribunal. He raises a storm, sends in his people, and is driven back by Tribunal forces. The Dunmer are too strong now. Wulfharth goes underground to wait and strengthen and reform his body anew. oddly enough, it is Almalexia who disturbs his rest, summoning the Underking to fight alongside the Tribunal against Ada’Soom Dir-Kamal, the Akaviri Demon. Wulfharth disappears after Ada'Soom is defeated, and does not return for three hundred years.

It is the rumblings of the Greybeards that wake him. Though the Empire has crumbled, there are rumours that a chosen one will come to restore it. This new Emperor will defeat the Elves and rule a united Tamriel. Naturally, Wulfharth thinks he is the figure of prophecy. He goes directly to High Hrothgar to hear the Greybeards speak. When they do, Ysmir is blasted to ash again. He is not the chosen one. It is a warrior youth from High Rock. As the Grey Wind goes to find this boy, he hears the Greybeards’ warning: remember the colour of betrayal, King Wulfharth.

The Western Reach was at war. Cuhlecain, the King of Falkreath in West Cyrodiil, was in a bad situation. To make any bid of unifying the Colovian Estates, he needed to secure his northern border, where the Nords and the Reachmen had been fighting for centuries. He allies with Skyrim at the Battle of Old Hroldan. Leading his forces was Hjalti Early-Beard. Hjalti was from the island kingdom of Alcaire, in High Rock, and would become Tiber Septim, the First Emperor of Tamriel.

Hjalti was a shrewd tactician, and his small band of Colovian troops and Nord berserkers broke the Reachman line, forcing them back beyond the gates of Old Hroldan. A siege seemed impossible, as Hjalti could expect no reinforcements from Falkreath. That night a storm came and visited Hjalti’s camp. It spoke with him in his tent. At dawn, Hjalti went up to the gates, and the storm followed just above his head. Arrows could not penetrate the winds around him. He shouted down the walls of Old Hroldan, and his men poured in. After their victory, the Nords called Hjalti Talos, or Stormcrown.

Cuhlecain, with his new invincible general, unifies West Cyrodiil in under a year. No one can stand before Hjalti’s storms. The Underking knows that if Hjalti is to become Emperor of Tamriel, he must first capture the Eastern Heartland. Hjalti uses them both. He needs Cuhlecain in the Colovian Estates, where foreigners are mistrusted. It is obvious why he needs Ysmir. They both march on the East, the battlemages surrender before their armies, and they take the Citadel. Before
Cuhlecain can be crowned, Hjalti secretly murders him and his loyalist contingent. These assassinations are blamed on the enemies of Cuhlecain, which, for political reasons, are still the Western Reach. Zurin Arctus, the Grand Battlemage (not the Underking), then crowns Hjalti as Tiber Septim, new Emperor of All Cyrodiil. After he captures the Imperial Throne, Septim finds the initial administration of a fully united Cyrodiil a time-consuming task. He sends the Underking to deal with Imperial expansion into Skyrim and High Rock. Ysmir, mindful that it might seem as if Tiber Septim is in two places at once, works behind the scenes. This period of levelheaded statesmanship and diplomacy, this sudden silence, heretofore unknown in the roaring tales of Talosian conquest, are explained away later. (The assassination story is embroidered—now it is popular that Talos’ own throat was cut.)

The human kingdoms are conquered, even Hammerfell, whose capture was figured to be an arduous task. The Underking wants a complete invasion, a chance to battle their foreign wind spirits himself, but Tiber Septim refutes him. He has already made a better plan, one that will legitimise his rule. Cyrodiil supports the losing side of a civil war and are invited in. Finally, the Empire can turn its eyes onto the Elves.

The Underking continues to press on Tiber Septim the need to conquer Morrowind. The Emperor is not sure that it is a wise idea. He has heard of the Tribunal’s power. The Underking wants his vengeance, and reminds Tiber Septim that he is fated to conquer the Elves, even the Tribunal. Arctus advises against the move but Septim covets the Ebony in Morrowind, as he sorely needs a source of capital to rebuild Cyrodiil after 400 years of war. The Underking tells him that, with the Tribunal dead, Septim might steal the Tribunal’s power and use it against the High Elves (certainly the oldest enemies of Lorkhan, predating even the Tribunal). Summerset Isle is the farthest thing from Tiber Septim’s mind. Even then, he was planning to send Zurin Arctus to the King of Alinor to make peace. The Ebony need wins out in the end. The Empire invades Morrowind, and the Tribunal give up. When certain conditions of the Armistice include not only a policy of noninterference with the Tribunal, but also, in the Underking’s eyes, a validation of their religious beliefs, Ysmir is furious. He abandons the Empire completely. This was the betrayal the Greybeards spoke of. Or so he thinks.

Without the Underking’s power, all ideas of conquering Tamriel vanish. Would’ve been nice, Septim thinks, but let’s just worry about Cyrodiil and the human nations. Already there is a rebellion in Hammerfell.

Pieces of Numidium trickle in, though. Tiber Septim, always fascinated by the Dwarves, has Zurin Arctus research this grand artefact. In doing so, Arctus stumbles upon some of the stories of the war of the Red Mountain. He discovers the reason the Numidium was made and some of its potential. Most importantly, he learns the Underking’s place in the War. But Zurin Arctus was working from incomplete plans. He thinks it is the heart of Lorkhan’s body that is needed to power the Numidium.

While Zurin Arctus is raving about his discovery, the prophecy finally becomes clear to Tiber Septim. The Numidium is what he needs to conquer the world. It is his destiny to have it. He contacts the Underking and says he was right all along. They should kill the Tribunal, and they need to get together and make a plan. While the Underking was away he realised the true danger of Dagoth-Ur. Something must be done. But he needs an army, and his old one is available again. The trap is set.

The Underking arrives and is ambushed by Imperial guards. As he takes them on, Zurin Arctus uses soulgem on him. With his last breath, the Underking’s Heart roars a hole through the Battlemage’s chest. In the end, everyone is dead, the Underking has reverted back to ash, and Tiber Septim strolls in to take the soulgem. When the Elder Council arrives, he tells them about the
second attempt on his life, this time by his trusted battlemage, Zurin Arctus, who was attempting a coup. He has the dead guards celebrated as heroes, even the one who was blasted to ash… He warns Cyrodiil about the dangers within, but says he has a solution to the dangers without. The Mantella.

The Numidium, while not the god Tiber Septim and the Dwemer hoped for (the Underking was not exactly Lorkhan, after all), it does the job. After its work on Summerset Isle a new threat appears—a rotting undead wizard who controls the skies. He blows the Numidium apart. But it pounds him into the ground with its last flailings, leaving only a blackish splotch. The Mantella falls into the sea, seemingly forever.

Meanwhile, Tiber Septim crowns himself the First Emperor of Tamriel. He lives until he is 108, the richest man in history. All aspects of his early reign are rewritten. Still, there are conflicting reports of what really happened, and this is why there is such confusion over such questions as: Why does Alcaire claim to be the birthplace of Talos, while other sources say he came from Atmora? Why does Tiber Septim seem to be a different person after his first roaring conquests? Why does Tiber Septim betray his battlemage? Is the Mantella the heart of the battlemage or is it the heart of Tiber Septim?

Tiber Septim is succeeded by his grandson, Pelagius Septim. Pelagius is just not of the same caliber. In truth, he’s a little nervous with all these provinces. Then an adviser shows up.

“I was friends with your grandfather,” the Underking says. “He sent me to help you run the Empire.”
Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for being slowly eaten alive by flies.

The Argonian Account
Book One

by Waughin Jarth

In a minor but respectable plaza in the Imperial City sat, or perhaps lounged, Lord Vanech’s Building Commission. It was an unimaginative, austere building not noted so much for its aesthetic or architectural design as for its prodigious length. If any critics wondered why such an unornamented, extended erection held such fascination for Lord Vanech, they kept it to themselves.

In the 398th year of the 3rd Era, Decumus Scotti was a senior clerk at the Commission.

It had been a few months since the shy, middle-aged man had brought Lord Vanech the most lucrative of all contracts, granting the Commission the exclusive right to rebuild the roads of Valenwood which had been destroyed in the Five Year War. For this, he had become the darling of the managers and the clerks, spending his days recounting his adventures, more or less faithfully… although he did omit the end of the tale, since many of them had partaken in the celebratory Unthrappa roast provided by the Silenstri. Informing one’s listeners that they’ve gorged on human flesh improves very few stories of any good taste.

Scotti was neither particularly ambitious nor hard-working, so he did not mind that Lord Vanech had not given him anything to actually do.

Whenever the squat little gnomish man would happen upon Decumus Scotti in the offices, Lord Vanech would always say, “You’re a credit to the Commission. Keep up the good work.”

In the beginning, Scotti had been worried that he was supposed to be doing something, but as the months went on, he merely replied, “Thank you. I will.”

There was, on the other hand, the future to consider. He was not a young man, and though he was receiving a respectable salary for someone not doing actual work, Scotti considered that soon he might have to retire and not get paid for not doing work. It would be nice, he decided, if Lord Vanech, out of gratitude for the millions of gold the Valenwood contract was generating, might deign to make Scotti a partner. Or at least give him a small percentage of the bounty.

Decumus Scotti was not good at asking for things like that, which was one of the reasons why, previous to his signal successes in Valenwood as a senior clerk for Lord Atrius, he was a lousy agent. He had just about made up his mind to say something to Lord Vanech, when his lordship unexpectedly pushed things along.

“You’re a credit to the Commission,” the waddling little thing said, and then paused. “Do you have
Scotti nodded eagerly, and followed his lordship to his hideously decorated and very enviable hectare of office space.

"Zenithar blesses us for your presence at the Commission," the little fellow squeaked grandly. "I don’t know whether you know this, but we were having a bad time before you came along. We had impressive projects, for certain, but they were not successful. In Black Marsh, for example, for years we’ve been trying to improve the roads and other routes of travel for commerce. I put my best man, Flesus Tijjo, on it, but every year, despite staggering investments of time and money, the trade along those routes only gets slower and slower. Now, we have your very clean, very profitable Valenwood contract to boost the Commission’s profits. I think it’s time you were rewarded."

Scotti grinned a grin of great delight and subtle avarice.

"I want you to take over the Black Marsh account from Flesus Tijjo."

Scotti shook as if awakening from a pleasant dream to hideous reality, “My Lord, I-I couldn’t—”

“Nonsense,” chirped Lord Vanech. “Don’t worry about Tijjo. He will be happy to retire on the money I give him, particularly as soul-wrenchingly difficult as this Black Marsh business has been. Just your sort of challenge, my dear Decumus.”

Scotti couldn’t utter a sound, though his mouth feebly formed the word “No” as Lord Vanech brought out the box of documentation on Black Marsh.

“You’re a fast reader,” Lord Vanech guessed. “You can read it all en route."

“En route to…”

“Black Marsh, of course,” the tiny fellow giggled. “You are a funny chap. Where else would you go to learn about the work that’s being done, and how to improve it?”

The next morning, the stack of documentation hardly touched, Decumus Scotti began the journey south-east to Black Marsh. Lord Vanech had hired an able-bodied guard, a rather Redguard named Mailic, to protect his best agent. They rode south along the Niben, and then southeast along the Silverfish, continuing on into the wilds of Cyrodiil, where the river tributaries had no names and the very vegetation seemed to come from another world than the nice, civilised gardens of the northern Imperial Province.

Scotti’s horse was tied to Mailic’s, so the clerk was able to read. It made it difficult to pay attention to the path they were taking, but Scotti knew he needed at least a cursory familiarity with the Commission’s business dealings in Black Marsh.

It was a huge box of paperwork going back forty years, when the Commission had first been given several million in gold by a wealthy trader, Lord Xellicles Pinos-Revina, to improve the road from Gideon to Cyrodiil. At that time, it took three weeks, a preposterously long time, for the rice and root he was importing to arrive, half-rotten, in the Imperial Province. Pinos-Revina was long dead, but many other investors over the decades, including Pelagius Septim V himself, had hired the Commission to build roads, drain swamps, construct bridges, devise anti-smuggling systems, hire mercenaries, and, in short, do everything that the greatest Empire in history would work to aide trade with Black Marsh. According to the latest figures, the results of this was that it took two and a half months for goods, now thoroughly rotten, to arrive.
Scotti found that when he looked up after concentrating on what he was reading, the landscape had always changed. Always dramatically. Always for the worse.

“This is Blackwood, sir,” said Mailic to Scotti’s unspoken question. It was dark and woodsly, so Decumus Scotti thought that a very appropriate name.

The question he longed to ask, which in due course he did ask, was, “What’s that terrible smell?”

“Slough Point, sir,” Mailic replied as they turned the next bend, where the umbrageous tunnel of tangled tree and vine opened to a clearing. There squatted a cluster of formal buildings in the dreary Imperial design favoured by Lord Vanech’s Commission and every Emperor since Tiber, together with a stench so eye-blindingly, stomach-wrenchingly awful that Scotti wondered, suddenly, if it were deadly poisonous. The swamps of blood-coloured, sand-grain-sized insects obscuring the air did not improve the view.

Scotti and Mailic batted at the buzzing clouds as they rode their horses towards the largest of the buildings, which on approach revealed itself to be perched at the end of a thick, black river. From its size and serious aspect, Scotti guessed it to be the census and excise office for the wide, white bridge that stretched across the burbling dark water to the reeds on the other side. It was a very nice, bright, sturdy-looking bridge, built, Scotti knew, by his Commission.

A poxy, irritable official opened the door quickly on Scotti’s first knock. “Come in, come in, quickly! Don’t let the fleshflies in!”

“Fleshflies?” Decumus Scotti trembled. “You mean, they eat human flesh?”

“If you’re fool enough to stand around and let them,” the soldier said, rolling his eyes. He had half an ear, and Scotti, looking around at the other soldiers in the fort noted that they all were well-chewed. One of them had no nose at all to speak of. “Now, what’s your business?”

Scotti told them, and added that if they stood outside the fortress instead of inside, they might catch more smugglers.

“You’d better be more concerned with getting over that bridge,” the soldier sneered. “Tide’s coming up, and if you don’t get a move on, you won’t get to Black Marsh for four days.”

That was absurd. A bridge swamped by a rising tide on a river? Only the look in the soldier’s eyes told Scotti he wasn’t joking.

Upon stepping out of the fort, he saw that the horses, evidently tired of being tortured by the fleshflies, had ripped free of their restraints and were bounding off into the woods. The oily water of the river was already lapping on the planks, oozing between the crevices. Scotti reflected that perhaps he would be more than willing to endure a wait of four days before going to Black Marsh, but Mailic was already running across.

Scotti followed him, wheezing. He was not in excellent shape, and never had been. The box of Commission materials was heavy. Halfway across, he paused to catch his breath, and then discovered he could not move. His feet were stuck.

The black mud that ran through the river was a thick gluey paste, and having washed over the plank Scotti was on, it held his feet fast. Panic seized him. Scotti looked up from his trip and saw Mailic leaping from plank to plank ahead of him, closing fast on the reeds on the other side.

“Help!” Scotti cried. “I’m stuck!”
Mailic did not even turn around, but kept jumping. “I know, sir. You need to lose weight.”

Decumus Scotti knew he was a few points over, and had meant to start eating less and exercising more, but embarking on a diet hardly seemed to promise timely aid in his current predicament. No diet on Nørn would have helped him just then. However, on reflection, Scotti realised that the Redguard intended that he drop the box of documents, for Mailic was no longer carrying of the essential supplies he had had with him previously.

With a sigh, Scotti threw the Commission notes into the glop, and felt the plank under him rise up a quarter of an inch, just enough to free him from the mud’s clutches. With an agility born of extreme fear, Scotti began leaping after Mailic, dropping onto every third plank, and springing up before the river gripped him.

In forty-six leaps, Decumus Scotti crashed through the reeds onto solid ground behind Mailic, and found himself in Black Marsh. He could hear behind him a slurping sound as the bridge, and his container of important and official records of Commission affairs, was consumed by the rising flood of dark filth, never to be seen again.
Decumus Scotti emerged from the dirt and reeds, exhausted from running, his face and arms sheathed in red fleshflies. Looking back towards Cyrodiil, he saw the bridge disappear beneath the thick black river, and he knew he was not going back until the tide went down in a few days’ time. The river also held in its adhesive depths his files on the Black Marsh account, he would have to rely on his memory for his contacts in Gideon.

Mailic was purposefully striding through the reeds ahead. Flailing ineffectively at the fleshflies, Scotti hurried after him.

“We’re lucky, sir,” said the Redguard, which struck Scotti as an extraordinary thing to say, until his eyes followed where the man’s finger was pointing. “The caravan is here.”

Twenty-one rusted, mud-spattered wagons with rotting wood and wobbly wheels sat half-sunk in the soft earth ahead. A crowd of Argonians, grey-scaled and grey-eyed, the sort of sullen manual labourers that were common in Cyrodiil, pulled at one of the wagons that had been detached from the others. As Scotti and Mailic came closer, they saw it was filled with a cargo of black berries so decayed that they had become hardly recognisable… more a festering jelly than a wagonload of fruit.

Yes, they were going to the city of Gideon, and, yes, they said, Scotti could get a ride with them after they were finished unloading this shipment of lumberies.

“How long ago were they picked?” Scotti asked, looking at the wagon’s rotten produce.

“The harvest was in Last Seed, of course,” said the Argonian that seemed to be in charge of the wagon. It was now Sun’s Dusk, so they had been en route from the fields for a little over two months.

Clearly, Scotti thought, there were problems with transportation. But fixing that, after all, was what he was doing here as a representative of Lord Vanech’s Building Commission.

It took close to an hour of the berries rotting even more in the sun for the wagon to be pushed to the side, the wagons in front of it and behind it to be attached to each other, and one of the eight horses from the front of the caravan to be brought to the now independent wagon. The labourers moved
with dispirited lethargy, and Scotti took the opportunity to inspect the rest of the caravan and talk to his fellow travellers.

Four of the wagons had benches in them, fit for uncomfortable riders. All the rest were filled with grain, meat, and vegetation in various stages of corruption.

The travellers consisted of the six Argonian labourers, three Imperial merchants so bug-bitten that their skin looked as scaly as the Argonians themselves, and three cloaked fellows who were evidently Dunmer, judging by the red eyes that gleamed in the shadows under their hoods. All were transporting their goods along this, the Imperial Commerce Road.

“This is a road?” Scotti exclaimed, looking at the endless field of reeds that reached up to his chin or higher.

“It’s solid ground, of a sort,” one of the hooded Dunmer shrugged. “The horses eat some of the reeds, and sometimes we set fire to it, but it just grows right back up.”

Finally, the wagonmaster signalled that the caravan was ready to go, and Scotti took a seat in the third wagon with the other Imperials. He looked around, but Mailic was not on board.

“I agreed to get you to Black Marsh and take you back out,” said the Redguard, who had plumped down on a rock in the sea of reeds and was munching on a hairy carrot. “I’ll be here when you get back.”

Scotti frowned, and not only because Mailic had dropped the deferential title “sir” while addressing him. Now he truly knew no one in Black Marsh, but the caravan slowly grinded and bumped forward, so there was no time to argue.

A noxious wind blew across the Commerce Road, casting patterns in the endless featureless expanse of reeds. In the distance, there seemed to be mountains, but they constantly shifted, and Scotti realised they were banks of mist and fog. Shadows flitted across the landscape, and when Scotti looked up, he saw that they were being cast by giant birds with long, saw-like beaks nearly the size of the rest of their bodies.

“Hackwings,” Chaero Gemullus, an Imperial on Scotti’s left, who might have been young but looked old and beaten, muttered. “Like everything else in this damnable place, they’ll eat you if you don’t keep moving. Beggars pounce down and give you a nasty chop, and then fly off and come back when you’re mostly dead from blood loss.”

Scotti shivered. He hoped they’d be in Gideon by nightfall. It was then it occurred to him that the sun was on the wrong side of the caravan.

“Excuse me, sir,” Scotti called to the wagonmaster. “I thought you said we were going to Gideon?

The wagonmaster nodded.

“Why are we going north then, when we should be going south?”

There was no reply but a sigh.

Scotti confirmed with his fellow travellers that they too were going to Gideon, and none of them seemed concerned about the circuitous route to getting there. The seats were hard on his middle-aged back and buttocks, but the bumping rhythm of the caravan, and the hypnotic waving reeds gradually had an effect on him, and Scotti drifted off to sleep.
He awoke in the dark some hours later, not sure where he was. The caravan was no longer moving, and he was on the floor, under a bench next to some small boxes. There were voices, speaking in a hissing, clicking language Scotti didn’t understand, and he peeked out between someone’s legs to see what was happening.

The moons barely pierced the thick mist surrounding the caravan, and Scotti didn’t have the best angle to see who was talking. For a moment, it looked like the wagonmaster was talking to himself, but the darkness had movement and moisture, in fact, glistening scales. It was hard to tell how many of these things there were, but they were big, black, and the more Scotti looked at them, the more details he could see.

When one particular detail emerged, huge mouths filled with dripping needle-like fangs, Scotti slipped back under the bench. Their black little eyes had not fallen on him yet.

The legs in front of Scotti moved and then began to thrash, as their owner was grabbed and pulled out of the wagon. Scotti crouched further back, getting behind the little boxes. He didn’t know much about concealment, but had some experience with shields. He knew that having something, anything, in between you and bad things was always good.

A few seconds after the legs disappeared from sight, there was a horrible scream. And then a second and a third. Different timbres, different accents, but the same inarticulate message… terror, and pain, horrible pain. Scotti remembered a long forgotten prayer to the god Stendarr and whispered it to himself.

Then there was silence… ghastly silence that lasted only a few minutes, but which seemed like hours… years.

And then the carriage started rolling forward again.

Scotti cautiously crawled out from under the carriage. Chaero Gemullus gave him a bemused grin.

“There you are,” he said. “I thought the Nagas took you.”

“Nagas?”

“Nasty characters,” Gemullus said, frowning. “Puff adders with legs and arms, seven feet tall, eight when they’re mad. Come from the inner swamp, and they don’t like it here much so they’re particularly peevish. You’re the kind of posh Imperial they’re looking for.”

Scotti had never in his life thought of himself as posh. His mud and fleshfly-bespeckled clothing seemed eminently middle-class, at best, to him. “What would they want me for?”

“To rob, of course,” the Imperial smiled. “And to kill. You didn’t notice what happened to the others?” The Imperial frowned, as if struck by a thought. “You didn’t sample from those boxes down below, did you? Like the sugar, do you?”

“Gods, no,” Scotti grimaced.

The Imperial nodded, relieved. “You just seem a little slow. First time in Black Marsh, I gather? Oh! Heigh ho, Hist piss!”

Scotti was just about to ask Gemullus what that vulgar term meant when the rain began. It was an inferno of foul-smelling, yellow-brown rain that washed over the caravan, accompanied by the growl of thunder in the distance. Gemullus worked to pull the roof up over the wagon, glaring at Scotti until he helped with the laborious process.
He shuddered, not only from the cold damp, but from contemplation of the disgusting precipitation pouring down on the already nasty produce in the uncovered wagon.

“We’ll be dry soon enough,” Gemullus smiled, pointing out into the fog.

Scotti had never been to Gideon, but he knew what to expect. A large settlement more or less laid out like an Imperial City, with more or less Imperial style architecture, and all the Imperial comforts and traditions, more or less.

The jumble of huts half-sunk in mud was decidedly less so.

“Where are we?” asked Scotti, bewildered.

“Hixinoag,” replied Gemullus, pronouncing the queer name with confidence. “You were right. We were going north when we should’ve been going south.”
Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for being slowly digested alive via a weird transport system, paralysis, and drowning.

Decumus Scotti was supposed to be in Gideon, a thoroughly Imperialised city in southern Black Marsh, arranging business dealings to improve commerce in the province on behalf of Lord Vanech’s Building Commission and its clients. Instead, he was in a half-submerged, rotten little village called Hixinoag, where he knew no one. Except for a drug smuggler named Chaero Gemullus.

Gemullus was not at all perturbed that the merchant caravan had gone north instead of south. He even let Scotti share his bucket of trodh, tiny little crunchy fish, he had bought from the villagers. Scotti would have preferred them to be cooked, or at any rate, dead, but Gemullus explained that dead, cooked trodh are deadly poison.

“If I were where I was supposed to be,” Scotti pouted, putting one of the wriggling little creatures in his mouth, “I could be having a roast, and some cheese, and a glass of wine.”

“I sell moonsugar in the north, and buy it in the south,” he shrugged. You have to be more flexible, my friend.”

“My only business is in Gideon,” Scotti frowned.

“Well, you have a couple choices,” replied the smuggler. “You could just stay here. Most villages in Argonia don’t stay put for very long, and there’s a good chance Hixinoag will drift right down to the gates of Gideon. Might take a month or two. Probably the easiest way.”

“That’d put me far behind schedule.”

“Next option, you could join up with the caravan again,” said Gemullus. “They might be going in the right direction this time, and they might not get stuck in the mud, and they might not all be murdered by Naga highwaymen.”

“Not tempting,” Scotti frowned. “Any other ideas?”

“Ride the roots. The underground express,” Gemullus grinned. “Follow me.”

Scotti followed Gemullus out of the village and into a copse of trees shrouded by veils of wispy moss. The smuggler kept his eye on the ground, poking at the viscous mud intermittently. Finally he found a spot which triggered a mass of big oily bubbles to rise to the surface.

“Perfect,” he said. “Now, the important thing is not to panic. This express will take you due south,
that’s the wintertide migration, and you’ll know you’re near Gideon when you see a lot of red clay. Just don’t panic, and when you see a mass of bubbles, that’s a breathing hole you can use to get out.”

Scotti looked at Gemullus blankly. The man was talking perfect gibberish. “What?”

Gemullus took Scotti by the shoulder and positioned him on top of the mass of bubbles. “You stand right here…”

Scotti sank quickly into the mud, staring at the smuggler, horror-struck.

“And remember to wait ’til you see the red clay, and the next time you see bubbles, push up…”

The more Scotti wriggled to get free, the faster he sunk. The mud enveloped Scotti to his neck, and he continued staring, unable to articulate anything but a noise like “Oog.”

“And don’t panic at the idea that you’re being digested. You could live in a rootworm’s belly for months.”

Scotti took one last panicked breath of air and closed his eyes before disappearing into the mud.

The clerk felt a warmth he hadn’t expected all around him. When he opened his eyes, he found that he was entirely surrounded by a translucent goo, and was travelling rapidly forward, southward, gliding through mud as if it were air, skipping along an intricate network of roots. Scotti felt confusion and euphoria in equal measures, madly rushing forward through an alien environment of darkness, spinning around and over the thick fibrous tentacles of the trees. It was if he were high in the sky at midnight, not deep beneath the swamp in the Underground Express.

Looking up slightly at the massive root structure above, Scotti saw something wriggle past. An eight-foot-long, armless, legless, colourless, boneless, eyeless, nearly shapeless creature, riding the roots. Something dark was inside of it, and as it came closer, Scotti could see it was an Argonian man. He waved, and the disgusting creature the Argonian was in flattened slightly and rushed onward.

Gemullus’s words began to reappear in Scotti’s mind at this sight. “The wintertide migration,” “air hole,” “you’re being digested,”—these were the phrases that danced around as if trying to find some place to live in a brain which was highly resistant to them coming in. But there was no other way to look at the situation. Scotti had gone from eating living fish to being eaten alive as a way of transport. He was in one of those worms.

Scotti made an executive decision to faint.

He woke up in stages, having a beautiful dream of being held in a woman’s warm embrace. Smiling and opening his eyes, the reality of where he really was rushed over him.

The creature was still rushing madly, blindly forward, gliding over roots, but it was no longer like a flight through the night sky. Now it was like the sky at sunrise, in pinks and reds. Scotti remembered Gemullus telling him to look for the red clay, and he would be near Gideon. The next thing he had to find was the bubbles.

There were no bubbles anywhere. Though the inside of the worm was still warm and comfortable, Scotti felt the weight of the earth all around him. “Just don’t panic,” Gemullus had said, but it was one thing to hear that advice, and quite another to take it. He began to squirm, and the creature began to move faster at the increased pressure from within.
Suddenly, Scotti saw it ahead of him, a slim spire of bubbles rising up through the mud from some underground stream, straight up, through the roots to the surface above him. The moment the rootworm went through it, Scotti pushed with all of his might upward, bursting through the creature’s thin skin. The bubbles pushed Scotti up quickly, and before he could blink, he was popping out of the red slushy mud.

Two grey Argonians were standing under a tree nearby, holding a net. They looked in Scotti’s direction with polite curiosity. In their net, Scotti noticed, were several squirming furry rat-like creatures. While he addressed them, another fell out of the tree. Though Scotti had not been educated in this practice, he recognised fishing when he saw it.

“Excuse me, lads,” Scotti said jovially. “I was wondering if you’d point me in the direction of Gideon?”

The Argonians introduced themselves as Drawing-Flame and Furl-of-Fresh-Leaves, and looked at one another, puzzling over the question.


“I believe his name is,” said Scotti, trying to remember the contents of his long gone file of Black Marsh contacts in Gideon. “Archein Right-Foot… Rock?”


Scotti thought that the best business he had heard in two days, and handed Drawing-Flame the five septims.

The Argonians led Scotti onto a muddy ribbon of road that passed through the reeds, and soon revealed the bright blue expanse of Topal Bay far to the west. Scotti looked around at the magnificent walled estates, where bright crimson blossoms sprang forth from the very dirt of the walls, and surprised himself by thinking, “This is very pretty.”

The road ran parallel to a fast-moving stream, running eastward from Topal Bay. It was called the Onkobra River, he was told. It ran deep into Black Marsh, to the very heart of the province.

Peeking past the gates to the plantations east of Gideon, Scotti saw that few of the fields were tended. Most had rotten crops from harvests past still clinging to wilted vines, orchards of desolate, leafless trees. The Argonian serfs who worked the fields were thin, weak, near death, more like haunting spirits than creatures of life and reason.

Two hours later, as the three continued their trudge east, the estates were still impressive at least from a distance, the road still solid if weedy, but Scotti was irritated, horrified by the field workers and the agricultural state, and no longer charitable towards the area. “How much further?”

Furl-of-Fresh-Leaves and Drawing-Flame looked at one another, as if that question was something that hadn’t occurred to them.

“Archein is east?” Furl-of-Fresh-Leaves pondered. “Near or far?”


“You don’t have any idea, do you?” Scotti cried. “Why couldn’t you tell me that in the first place when I might have asked someone else?”
Around the bend up ahead, there was the sound of hoofbeats. A horse coming closer.

Scotti started walking towards the sound to hail the rider, and didn’t see Drawing-Flame’s taloned claws and cast the spell at him. He felt it though. A kiss of ice along his spine, the muscles along his arms and legs suddenly immobile as if wrapped in rigid steel. He was paralysed.

The great curse of paralysis, as the reader may be unfortunate enough to know, is that you continue to see and think even though your body does not respond. The thought that went through Scotti’s mind was, “Damn.”

For Drawing-Flame and Furl-of-Fresh-Leaves were, of course, like most simple day labourers in Black Marsh, accomplished Illusionists. And no friend of the Imperial.

The Argonians shoved Decumus Scotti to the side of the road, just as the horse and rider came around the corner. He was an impressive figure, a nobleman in a flashing dark green cloak exactly the same colour as his scaled skin, and a frilled hood that was part of his flesh and sat upon his head like a horned crown.

“Greetings, brothers!” the rider said to the two.

“Greetings, Archein Right-Foot-Rock,” they responded, and then Furl-of-Fresh-Leaves added, “What is milord’s business on this fine day?”

“No rest, no rest,” the Archein sighed regally. “One of my she-workers gave birth to twins. Twins! Fortunately, there’s a good trader in town for those, and she did not put up much of a fuss. And then there’s the fool of an Imperial from Lord Vanech’s Building Commission I am supposed to meet with in Gideon. I’m sure he’ll want the grand tour before he opens up the treasury for me. Such a lot of fuss.”

Drawing-Flame and Furl-of-Fresh-Leaves sympathised, and then, as Archein Right-Foot-Rock rode off, they went to look for their hostage.

Unfortunately for them, gravity being the same in Black Marsh as everywhere else in Tamriel, their hostage, Decumus Scotti, had continued to roll down from where they left him, and was, at that moment, in the Onkobra River, drowning.
Decumus Scotti was drowning, and he didn’t think much of it. He couldn’t move his arms or legs to swim because of the paralysis spell the Argonian peasant had lobbed at him, but he wasn’t quite sinking. The Onkobra River was a crashing force of white water and currents that could carry along large rocks with ease, so Scotti tumbled head over heels, spinning, bumping, bouncing along.

He figured that soon enough he would be dead, and that would be better than being in Black Marsh. He wasn’t too panicked about it all when his lungs filled with water and cold blackness fell upon him.

For a while, for the first time in some time, Decumus Scotti felt peace. Blessed darkness. And then pain came to him, and he felt himself coughing, spewing water up from his belly and his lungs.

A voice said, “Oh bother, he’s alive, ain’t he, now?”

Scotti wasn’t quite sure if that were true, even when he opened his eyes and looked at the face above him. It was an Argonian, but unlike any he had seen anywhere. The face was thin and long like a thick lance; the scales were ruby-red, brilliant in the sunlight. It blinked at him, its eyelids opening and closing in vertical slits.

“I don’t suppose we should you, should we now?” the creature smiled, and Scotti could tell from its teeth that it was no idle suggestion.

“Thank you,” said Scotti weakly. He craned his neck slightly to find out who the “we” were, and discovered he was on the muddy bank of the sill, sludgy river, surrounded by a group of Argonians with similarly needle-like faces and a whole rainbow of scales. Bright greens and gem-like purples, blues, and oranges.

“Can you tell me, am I near—well, anything?”

The ruby-coloured Argonian laughed. “No. You’re in the middle of everywhere, and near nowhere.”

“Oh,” said Scotti, who grasped the idea that space did not mean much in Black Marsh. “And what are you?”

“We are Agacephs,” the ruby-coloured Argonian replied. “My name is Nomu.”

Scotti introduced himself. “I’m a senior clerk in Lord Vanech’s Building Commission in the
Imperial City. My job was to come here to try to fix the problems with commerce, but I’ve lost my agenda, haven’t met with any of my contacts, the Archein of Gideon…”

“Pompous, assimilated, slaver kleptocrats,” a small lemon-coloured Argonian murmured with some feeling.

“… And now I just want to go home.”

Nomu smiled, his long mouth arching up like a host happy to see an unwanted guest leave a party. “Shehs will guide you.”

Shehs, it seemed, was the bitter little yellow creature, and he was not at all pleased at the assignment. With surprising strength, he hoisted Scotti up, and for a moment, the clerk was reminded of Gemullus dropping him into the bubbling muck that led to the Underground Express. Instead, Shehs shoved Scotti toward a tony little raft, razor-thin, that bobbed on the surface of the water.

“This is how you travel?”

“We don’t have the broken wagons and dying horses of our brothers on the outside,” Shehs replies, rolling his tiny eyes. “We don’t know better.”

The Argonian sat ate the back of the craft and used his whip-like tail to propel and navigate the craft. They travelled quickly around swirling pools of slime that stank of centuries of putrefaction, past pinnacled mountains that seemed study but suddenly fell apart at the slightest ripple in the still water, under bridges that might have once been metal but were now purely rust.

“Everything in Tamriel flows down to Black Marsh,” Shehs said.

As they slid through the water, Shehs explained to Scotti that the Agacephs were one of the many Argonian tribes that lived in the interior of province, near the Hist, finding little in the outside world worth seeing. He was fortunate to have been found by them. The Nagas, the toad-like Paatru, and the winged Sarpa would have killed him on the spot.

There were other creatures too to be avoided. Though there were few natural predators in inner Black Marsh, the scavengers that rooted in the garbage seldom shied away from a living meal. Hackwings circled overhead, like the ones Scotti had seen in the west.

Shehs fell silent and stopped the raft completely, waiting for something.

Scotti looked in the direction Shehs was watching, and saw nothing unusual in the filthy water. Then, he realised that the pool of green slime in front of them was actually moving, and fairly quickly, from one bank to the other. It deposited small bones behind it as it oozed up into the reeds, and disappeared.

“Voriplasm,” Shehs explained, moving the boat forward again. “Big word. It’ll strip you to the bone by the second syllable.”

Scotti, desirous to distract himself from the sights and smells that surrounded him, thought it a good time to compliment his pilot on his excellent vocabulary. It was particularly impressive, given how far from civilisation they were. The Argonians in the east did, in fact, speak so well.

“They tried to erect a Temple of Mara near here, in Umpholo, twenty years ago,” Shehs explained, and Scotti nodded, remembering reading about it in the files before they were lost. “They all perished quite dreadfully of swamp rot in the first month, but they left behind some excellent
books.”

Scotti was going to enquire further when he saw something so huge, so horrifying, it made him stop, frozen.

Half submerged in the water ahead was a mountain of spines, lying on nine-foot-long claws. White eyes stared blindly forward, and then suddenly the whole creature spasmed and lurched, the jaw of its mouth jutting out, exposing tusks clotted with gore.


Scotti gasped, wondering why the Agaceph was so calm, and more, why he was continuing to steer the raft forward towards the beast.

“Of all the creatures in the world, the rats are sometimes the worst,” said Shehs, and Scotti noticed that the huge creature was only a husk. Its movement was from the hundreds of rats that had burrowed into it, rapidly eating their way from the inside out, bursting from the skin in spots.

“They are indeed,” Scotti said, and his mind went back to the Black Marsh flies, buried deep in the mud, and four decades of Imperial work in Black Marsh.

The two continued westward through the heart of Black Marsh.

Shehs showed Scotti the vast complicated ruins of the Kothringi capitals, fields of ferns and flowered grasses, quiet streams under canopies of blue moss, and the most astonishing sight of Scotti’s life—the great forest of full-grown Hist trees. They never saw a living soul until they arrived at the edge of the Imperial Commerce Road just east of Slough Point, where Mailic, Scotti’s Redguard guide, was waiting patiently.

“I was going to give you two more minutes,” the Redguard scowled, dropping the last of his food onto the pile at his feet. “No more, sir.”

The sun was shining bright when Decumus Scotti rode into the Imperial City, and as it caught the morning dew, it lent a glisten to every building as if they had been newly polished for his arrival. It astonished him how clean the city was. And how few beggars there were.

The protracted edifice of Lord Vanech’s Building Commission was the same as it had always been, but still the very sight of it seemed exotic and strange. It was not covered in mud. The people within actually, genuinely, worked.

Lord Vanech himself, though singularly squat and squinty, seemed immaculate, not only relatively clean of dirt and scabs, but also relatively uncorrupt. Scotti couldn’t help but stare at him when he first caught site of his boss. Vanech stared right back.

“You are a sight,” the little fellow frowned. “Did your horse drag you to Black Marsh and back? I would say go home and fix yourself, but there are a dozen people here to see you. I hope you have solutions for them.”

It was no exaggeration. Nearly twenty of Cyrodiil’s most powerful and wealthiest people were waiting for him. Scotti was given an office even larger than Lord Vanech’s, and he met with each.

First among the Commission’s clients were five independent traders, blustering and loaded with gold, demanding to know what Scotti intended to do about improving the trade route. Scotti summarised for them the conditions of the main roads, the state of the merchants’ caravan, the sunken bridges, and all other implements between the frontier and the marketplace. They told him
to have everything replaced and repaired, and gave him the gold necessary to do it.

Within three months, the bridge at Slough Point had disappeared into the muck; the great caravan had collapsed into decrepitude; and the main road from Gideon had been utterly swallowed up by swamp water. The Argonians began once again to use the old ways, their personal rafts and sometimes the Underground Express to transport the grain in small quantities. It took a third of the time, two weeks, to arrive in Cyrodiil, none of it rotten.

The Archbishop of Mara was the next client Scotti met with. A kindhearted man, horrified by the tales of Argonian mothers selling their children into slavery, he pointedly asked Scotti if it were true.

“Sadly, yes,” Scotti replied, and the Archbishop showered him with septims, telling the clerk that food must be brought to the province to ease their suffering, and the schools must be improved so they could learn to help themselves.

Within five months, the last book had been stolen from the deserted Maran monastery in Umpholo. As the Archeins went bankrupt, their slaves returned to their parents’ tiny farms. The backwater Argonians found that they could grow enough to feed their families provided they had enough hard workers in their enclave, and the buyers market for slaves sharply declined.

Ambassador Tsleeixth, concerned about the rising crime in northern Black Marsh, brought with him the contributions of many other expatriate Argonians like himself. They wanted more Imperial guards on the border of the at Slough Point, more magically lit lanterns posted along the main roads at regular intervals, more patrol stations, and more schools built to allow young Argonians to better themselves and not turn to crime.

Within six months, there were no more Nagas roaming the roads, as there were no merchants travelling them to rob. The thugs returned to the fetid inner swamp, where they felt much happier, their constitutions enriched by the rot and pestilence that they loved. Tsleeixth and his constituency were so pleased by the crime rate dropping, they brought even more gold to Decumus Scotti, telling him to keep up the good work.

Black Marsh simply was, is, and always shall be unable to sustain a large-scale, cash-crop plantation economy. The Argonians, and anyone else, the whole of Tamriel, could live in Black Marsh on subsistence farming, just raising what they needed. That was not sad, Scotti though; that was hopeful.

Scotti’s solution to each of their dilemmas had been the same. Ten percent of the gold they gave him went to Lord Vanech’s Building Commission. The rest Scotti kept for himself, and did exactly nothing about the requests.

Within a year, Decumus Scotti had embezzled enough to retire very comfortably, and Black Marsh was better off than it had been in forty years.
The Armourer's Challenge

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

The Armourer’s Challenge

by Mymophonus

Three hundred years ago, when Katariah became Empress, the first and only Dunmer to rule all of Tamriel, she faced opposition from the Imperial Council. Even after she convinced them that she would be the best regent to rule the Empire while her husband Pelagius sought treatment for his madness, there was still conflict. In particular from the Duke of Vengheto, Thane Minglumire, who took particular delight in exposing all of the Empress’s lack of practical knowledge.

In this particular instance, Katariah and the Council were discussing the unrest in Black Marsh and the massacre of Imperial troops outside the village of Armanias. The sodden swampland and the sweltering climate, particularly in summertime, would endanger the troops if they wore their usual armour.

“I know a very clever armourer,” said Katariah. “His name is Hazadir, an Argonian who knows the environments our army will be facing. I knew him in Vivec where he was a slave to the master armourer there, before he moved to the Imperial City as a freedman. We should have him design armour and weaponry for the campaign.”

Minglumire gave a short, barking laugh: “She wants a slave to design the armour and weaponry for our troops! Sirollus Saccus is the finest armourer in the Imperial City. Everyone knows that.”

After much debate, it was finally decided to have both armourers contend for the commission. The Council also elected two champions of equal power and prowess, Nandor Beraid and Raphalas Eul, to battle using the arms and armaments of the real competitors in the struggle. Whichever champion won, the armourer who supplied him would earn the Imperial commission. It was decided that Beraid would be outfitted by Hazadir, and Eul by Saccus.

The fight was to commence in seven days.

Sirollus Saccus began work immediately. He would have preferred more time, but he recognised the nature of the test. The situation in Armanias was urgent. The Empire had to select their armourer quickly, and once selected, the preferred armourer had to act swiftly and produce the finest armour for the Imperial army in Black Marsh. It wasn’t just the best armourer they were looking for. It was the most efficient.

Saccus had only just begun steaming the half-inch strips of black virgin oak to bend into bands for the flanges of the armour joints when there was a knock at his door. His assistant Phandius ushered in the visitor. It was a tall reptilian of common markings, a dull, green-fringed hood, bright black eyes, and a dull brown cloak. It was Hazadir, Katariah’s preferred armourer.

“I wanted to wish you the best of luck on the—is that ebony?”
It was indeed. Saccus had bought the finest quality ebony weave available in the Imperial City as soon as he heard of the competition and had begun the process of smelting it. Normally it was a six-month procedure refining the ore, but he hoped that a massive convection oven stoked by white flames born of magicka would shorten the operation to three days. Saccus proudly pointed out the other advancements in his armoury. The acidic lime pools to sharpen the blade of the dai-katana to an unimaginable degree of sharpness. The Akaviri forge and tongs he would use to fold the ebony back and forth upon itself. Hazadir laughed.

“Have you been to my armoury? It’s two tiny smoke-filled rooms. The front is a shop. The back is filled with broken armour, some hammers, and a forge. That’s it. That’s your competition for the millions of gold pieces in Imperial commission.”

“I’m sure the Empress has some reason to trust you to outfit her troops,” said Sirollus Saccus, kindly. He had, after all, seen the shop and knew that what Hazadir said was true. It was a pathetic workshop in the slums, for only for the lowliest of adventurers to get their iron daggers and cuirasses repaired. Saccus had decided to make the best quality regardless of the inferiority of his rival. It was his way and how he became the best armourer in the Imperial City.

Out of kindness, and more than a bit of pride, Saccus showed Hazadir how, by contrast, things should be done in a real professional armoury. The Argonian acted as an apprentice to Saccus, helping him refine the ebony ore, and to pound it and fold it when cooled. Over the next several days, they worked together to create a beautiful dai-katana with an edge honed sharp enough to trim a mosquito’s eyebrows, enchanted with flames along its length by one of the Imperial Battlemages, as well as a suit of armour of bound wood, leather, silver, and ebony to resist the winds of Oblivion.

On the day of the battle, Saccus, Hazadir, and Phandius finished polishing the armour and brought in Raphalas Eul for the fitting. Hazadir left only then, realising that Nandor Beraid would be at his shop shortly to be outfitted.

The two warriors met before the Empress and the Imperial Council in the arena, which had been flooded slightly to simulate the swampy conditions of Black Marsh. From the moment Saccus saw Eul in his suit of heavy ebony and blazing dai-katana and Beraid in his collection of dusty, rusted lizard-scales and spear from Hazadir’s shop, he knew who would win. And he was right.

The first blow from the dai-katana lodged in Beraid’s soft shield, as there was no metal trim to deflect it. Before Eul could pull his sword back, Beraid let go of the now-flaming shield, still stuck on the sword, and poked at the joints of Eul’s ebony armour with his spear. Eul finally retrieved his sword from the ruined shield and slashed at Beraid, but his light armour was scaled and angled, and the attacks rolled off into the water, extinguishing the dai-katana’s flames. When Beraid struck at Eul’s feet, he fell into the churned mud and was unable to move. The Empress, out of mercy, called a victor.

Hazadir received the commission and thanks to his knowledge of Argonian battle tactics and weaponry and how best to combat them, he designed implements of war that brought down the insurrection in Armanias. Katariah won the respect of the Council, and even, grudgingly, that of Thane Minglumire. Sirollus Saccus went to Morrowind to learn what Hazadir learned there, and was never heard from again.
Arondil’s Journal

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for experimentation.

Arondil’s Journal

Day 1

It seems the cretins of Dawnstar are not quite a foolish as I had surmised. They found my experimentations, and needless to say, were not pleased with what they saw. No matter. My work can only flourish without the distractions of living amongst the unenlightened.

I have found a cave off the north coast of Skyrim that will be more than sufficient for my continued studies. The ruins of Yngvild should hold materials I need to learn more about reanimating and enslaving the dead.

On a personal note, I WILL miss the young maidens at Dawnstar. Such beauty was intoxication. I often found my thoughts wandering around them, imagining secret encounters between myself and one or two of the local girls…
Arondil’s Journal, Part 2

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for desecration.

Arondil’s Journal

Day 8

A have established a temporary work station in the cold caves, and have found multiple burial chambers within the snow and ice. While in the first chamber, I exhumed a few ‘test subjects’, all female. I was stunned to find my mind wandering again to the women in Dawnstar as I examined my find. At first, I was slightly disturbed by my thoughts, but later I found myself reevaluating…

Day 9

The first trials went splendidly. Each subject was reanimated in a state of total complacency, bending to my every task and whim. I have ordered a few of my servants to guard the island, while the rest will act as my personal entourage, standing by me at all times. Standing over me while I sleep…
Arondil’s Journal

Day 21

An intriguing development. Tonight, my guards brought me a trespasser they found near the cave. At first I was understandably upset. Not only was I disturbed during one of my few moments alone with my favourite servant, but I recognised the trespasser as a milk maid from Dawnstar. She remembered me, as well, and made bold claims that I had been lurking near her at all hours. What lies! True, I had taken notice of her on occasion, but she was nowhere near the most noticeable of maidens in town. Her continued accusations, coupled with my fear of more uninvited guests, led me to conclude that she could never return to Dawnstar. My servants were quick to carry out my sentencing.

Her body is here next to me, as I write this. Funny. Her eyes are still so full of life. Perhaps I will try a new experiment tonight, using fresher materials.
Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for implied necrophilia and a long-winded innuendo for being horny.

**Arondil’s Journal**

**Day 28**

The new experiment has proven a success! The milk maid (who’s name still escapes me) was revived as the others, bowing to my commands, with only one interesting development. She has reformed incorporeally, more phantasm than reanimated dead. As her glowing visage stood before me, I found my hand reaching out to touch her. As my fingers passed through her, I felt a sensation unlike any other, as if her essence were reinvigorating my very soul, connecting with me on a level no woman of flesh and blood could do. This discovery is life changing!

**Day 35**

I have ordered my older servants to go out and find any more subjects that may have become lost. With the discovery of the inner sanctum deeper still in Yngvild, I should have sufficient room to stope many new materials until I can transform them into willing slaves. I look back on my daydreams whilst living in Dawnstar and wonder if they were in fact portents of times to come…
Thanks for reading and reviewing. This one was so boring instead of rewriting it word-for-word, I just copy and pasted it, so I have no idea what's in it. If you guys read it, and see something that could be deemed triggering, please tell me. I just can't sit through it.

Chapter 3: Dispositions

Master Arctus said:

1. The moment to prepare your offence is the moment the enemy becomes vulnerable to attack.

   - **Leros Chael:** Knowledge of the enemy mage’s mind is of the foremost importance. Once you know his mind, you will know his weaknesses.
   - **Sedd Mar:** Master Arctus advised Tiber Septim before the Battle of Five Bridges not to commit his reserves until the enemy was victorious. Tiber Septim said, “If the enemy is already victorious, what use committing the reserve?” To which Master Arctus replied, “Only in victory will the enemy be vulnerable to defeat.” Tiber Septim went on to rout an enemy army twice the size of his.

2. The enemy’s vulnerability may be his strongest point; your weakness may enable you to strike the decisive blow.

   - **Marandro Ur:** In the wars between the Nords and the Chimer. The Nord shamans invariably used their mastery of the winds to call down storms before battle to confuse and dismay the Chimer warriors. One day, a clever Chimer sorcerer conjured up an ice demon and commanded him to hide in the rocks near the rear of the Chimer army. When the Nords called down the storms as usual, the Chimer warriors began to waver. But the ice demon rose up as the storm struck, and the Chimer turned in fear from what they believed was a Nord demon and charged into the enemy line, less afraid of the storm than of the demon. The Nords, expecting the Chimer to flee as usual, were caught off guard when the Chimer attacked out of the midst of the storm. The Chimer were victorious that day.

3. When planning a campaign, take account of both the arcane and the mundane. The skillful battlemage ensures that they are in balance; a weight lifted by one hand is heavier than two weights lifted by both hands.

4. When the arcane and mundane are in balance, the army will move effortlessly, like a swinging door on well-oiled hinges. When they are out of balance, the army will be like a three-legged dog, with one leg always dragging in the dust.
5. Thus when the army strikes a blow, it will be like a thunderclap out of a cloudless sky. The best victories are those unforeseen by the enemy, but obvious to everyone afterwards.

6. The skilful battlemage ensures that the enemy is already defeated before the battle begins. A close-fought battle is to be avoided; the fortunes of war may turn aside the most powerful sorcery, and courage may undo the best-laid plans. Instead, win your victory ahead of time. When the enemy knows he is defeated before the battle begins, you may not need to fight.

7. Victory in battle is only the least kind of victory. Victory without battle is the acme of skill.

8. Conserving your power is another key to victory. Putting forth your strength to win a battle is no demonstration of skill. This is what we call tactics, the least form of the art of war magic.

   - **Thulidden dir’Tharkun**: By ’tactics’, Master Arctus includes all the common battle magics. These are only the first steps in an understanding of war magic. Any hedge mage can burn up his enemies with fire. Destroying the enemy is the last resort of the skilful battlemage.

9. The battle is only a leaf on the tree; if a leaf falls, does the tree die? But when a branch is lopped off, the tree is weakened; when the trunk is girdled, the tree is doomed.

10. If you plan your dispositions well, your victories will seem easy and you will win no acclaim. If you plan your dispositions poorly, your victories will seem difficult, and your fame will be widespread.

   - **Marandro Sul**: Those commonly believed to be the greatest practitioners of war magic are almost always those with the least skill. The true masters are not known to the multitude.
Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Arvel’s Journal

My fingers are trembling. The Golden Claw is finally in my hands, and with it, the power of the ancient Nordic heroes. That fool Lucan Valerius had no idea that his favourite store decoration was actually the key to Bleak Falls Barrow.

Now I just need to get to the Hall of Stories and unlock the door. The legend says there is a test that the Nords put in place to keep the unworthy away, but that “when you have the golden claw, the solution is in the palm of your hands.”
Atlas of Dragons

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Atlas of Dragons

by Brother Mathnan

Herein is recorded the list of known dragons, living and dead, including those slain by the Dragonguard since the time of its founding, as well as those slain in earlier ages, where they can be identified. Unfortunately, only a few of the dragons slain by our Akaviri predecessors during the Crusade were recorded and thus this list is sadly incomplete.

Deceased by Report

Nahagliiv—Local tales name him as the dragon buried in the mound west of Rorikstead. No date associated with its death, although almost surely dates to the Dragon War era.

Odahviing—Records dating to the Crusade of interrogation of captured Dragon Cultists indicate that this dragon was buried in a mound in the southeast of Skyrim, near Riften.

Sahloknir—Local legends claim this is the dragon buried in the mound near Kyne’s Grove, slain by the Nord hero Jorg Helmbolg in the First Era.

Viinturuth—Death dating back to Dragon War era, according to documents recovered from Dragon Cult temples which record his burial near Lake Yorgrim.

Vuljotnaak—Death dating back to Dragon War or just after, according to recovered Dragon Cult documents, which record his burial in a mound near Granite Hill.

Slain by the Dragonguard

Grahkrindrog—Slain in 2E 184 after perpetrating great slaughter in Winterhold and Eastmarch. Name confirmed with assistance from the College mages.

Krahjotdaan—Slain in 1E2871 in the southern Jerall Mountains, name confirmed by the dragon’s own account.

Unnamed Dragons—Numbering 12, as recorded in the Annals dating back to the founding of Sky Haven Temple.

Known to Live

Ahbiilok—Sightings dating back to the early years of the Dragonguard throughout the northern Jeralls. Multiple attempts to kill him have failed. He is believed to be lairing somewhere in
Morrowind.

Mirmulnir—Last sighted in the Reach in 2E 212.

Nahfahlaar—Repeated alliances with mortal protectors which have prevented his elimination. His last known protector was the King Casimir II of Wayrest, which the Dragonguard successfully ended in 2E 369. He escaped and current location is unknown.

Paarthurnax—The legendary lieutenant of Alduin in the Dragon War. His is now known to lair on the Throat of the World under the protection of the Greybeards of High Hrothgar. Master Araidh continues the established policy of avoiding direct confrontation with the Greybeards while waiting for an opportunity to exact justice upon him.
Nephew—

I apologise that I cannot see you personally before you leave. The trip from Sadrith Mora is treacherous this season, or I would have visited upon hearing the news. The Nords have a fine college at Winterhold, and I am sure you will exceed. You may know that I, too, attended there. I was quite the conjuration adept in my own day. I am sending you my notes on something called the ‘Atronach Forge’, a bit of a project of mine while at Winterhold.

Mention nothing to the faculty, but ask your fellow pupils about a place called the Midden. You will find the Forge there. I fear a number of my notes are missing, scattered and lost in my travels around Skyrim. Perhaps you will stumble across these in your own adventures.

The Atronach Forge offers few clues as to who built it, and even fewer as to how to unlock its full potential. Only through blind experimentation, and a few singed eyebrows, have I been able to understand its function.

The Forge is mostly a large dias, almost crude of make, but emblazoned with the traditional Daedric rune. An offering box is attached, as well as a prominent lever.

The Dias also features a large setting which seems set to receive some large, spherical object. I have had no luck determining what this missing object may be, however, or what effect it may have on the efficacy of the Forge.

The Forge is activated by placing certain items into the offering box, and then pulling the lever. The Forge consumes the items and conjures something upon the dias. The conjuration can be predicted reliably if the appropriate items are left in the box—but many combinations either have no effect or catastrophic reactions. Once I conjured a wild goat! Well, most of the goat, at least.

Experimenting wildly with the Forge is dangerous. I’ve recorded such recipes as I have discovered on the following pages.

The simplest, yet perhaps most hazardous stable recipe is that for a summoned atronach. The conjured brutes will attack the first thing they see, however! Be ready for battle if you have reason to use these recipes.

Flame Atronach:

    Fire Salts + Ruby

Frost Atronach:
Frost Salts + Sapphire

Storm Atronach:

Void Salts + Amethyst
Azura and the Box

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for death.

Ancient Tales of the Dwemer
Part XI: Azura and the Box

by Marobar Sul

Nchylbar had enjoyed an adventurous youth, but had grown to be a very wise, very old Dwemer who spent his life searching for the truth and dispelling superstitions. He invented much and created many theorems and logic structures that bore his name. But most of the world still puzzled him, and nothing was a greater enigma to him than the nature of the Aedra and Daedra. Over the course of his research, he came to the conclusion that many of the Gods were entirely fabricated by man and mer.

Nothing, however, was a greater question to Nchylbar than the limits of divine power. Were the Greater Beings the masters of the entire world, or did the humbler creatures have the strength to forge their own destinies? As Nchylbar found himself nearing the end of his life, he felt he must understand this last basic truth.

Among the sage’s acquaintances was a holy Chimer priest named Athynic. When the priest was visiting Bthalag-Zturmz, Nchylbar told him what he intended to do to find the nature of divine power. Athynic was terrified and pleaded with his friend not to break this great mystery, Nchylbar was resolute. Finally, the priest agreed to assist out of love of his friend, though he feared the results of this blasphemy.

Athynic summoned Azura. After the usual rituals by which the priest declared his faith in her powers and Azura agreed to do no harm to him, Nchylbar and a dozen of his students entered the summoning chamber, carrying with them a large box.

“As we see you in our land, Azura, you are the Goddess of Dusk and Dawn and all the mysteries therein,” said Nchylbar, trying to appear as kindly and obsequious as he could be. “It is said that your knowledge is absolute.”

“So it is,” smiled the Daedra.

“You would know, for example, what is in this wooden box,” said Nchylbar.

Azura turned to Athynic, her brow furrowed. The priest was quick to explain, “Goddess, this Dwemer is a very wise and respected man. Believe me, please, the intention is not to mock your greatness, but to demonstrate it to this scientist and to the rest of his skeptical race. I have tried to explain your power to him, but his philosophy is such that he must see it demonstrated.”

“If I am to demonstrate my might in a way to bring the Dwemer race to understanding, it might have been a more impressive feat you would have me do,” growled Azura, and turned to look Nchylbar in the eyes. “There is a red-petalled flower in the box.”
Nchylbar did not smile or frown. He simply opened the box and revealed to all that it was empty.

When the students turned to look at Azura, she was gone. Only Athynic had seen the Goddess’s expression before she vanished, and he could not speak, he was trembling so. A curse had fallen, he knew that truly, but even crueler was the knowledge of divine power that had been demonstrated. Nchylbar also looked pale, uncertain on his feet, but his face shone with not fear, but bliss. The smile of a Dwemer finding evidence for a truth only suspected.

Two of his students supported him, and two more supported the priest as they left the chamber.

“I have studied very much over the years, performed countless experiments, taught myself a thousand languages, and yet the skill that has taught me the final truth is one that I learned when I was but a poor, young man, trying only to have enough gold to eat,” whispered the sage.

As he was escorted up the stairs to his bed, a red flower petal fell from the sleeve of his voluminous robe. Nchylbar died that night, a portrait of peace that comes from contented knowledge.

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Publisher’s Note

This is another tale whose origin is unmistakably Dwemer. Again, the words of some Aldmeris translations are quite different, but the essence of the story is the same. The Dunmer have a similar tale about Nchylbar, but in the Dunmer version, Azura recognises the trick and refuses to answer the question. She slays the Dwemer present for their skepticism and curses the Dunmer for blasphemy.

In the Aldmeris version, Azura is tricked not by an empty box, but by a box containing a sphere which somehow becomes a flat square. Of course the Aldmeris versions, being a few steps closer to the original Dwemer, are much more difficult to understand. Perhaps this “stage magic” explanation was added by Gor Felim because of Felim’s own experience with such tricks in his plays when a mage was not available.

“Marobar Sul” left even the character Nchylbar alone, and he represents many “Dwemer” virtues. His skepticism, while not nearly as absolute as in the Aldmeris version, is celebrated even though it brings a curse upon the Dwemer and the unnamed House of the poor priest.

Whatever the true nature of the Gods, and how right or wrong the Dwemer were about them, this tale might explain why the dwarves vanished from the face of Tamriel. Though Nchylbar and his kind may not have intended to mock the Aedra and Daedra, their skepticism certainly offended the Divine Orders.
Bandit Leader's Journal

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

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**Bandit Leader’s Journal**

**5th of First Seed, 4E 201**

Idiots! Brodir and Herd were at each other’s throats again today, and nearly came to blows. The whole camp is on edge. I’ve ordered an extra ration of mead, but unless this fighting stops, we’ll tear ourselves apart.

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**11 of First Seed, 4E 201**

Rumour is that Herd’s gathering forces for a mutiny. Brodir’s not stupid; he’s probably doing the same, just for insurance. I’d kill them both myself, but the camp’s split right down the middle. If I tried, there’d be a knife in my back within a week.

I can’t take this anymore. I’ve begun skimming a little gold from the take, bringing it down here when I can. If I can scrape enough together, I’ll make a run for it, head downriver to Dragon Bridge.

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**28th of First Seed, 4E 201**

Brodir’s getting suspicious—I caught him poking around in the cove this afternoon. I don’t think he found my stash, but it’s not safe here. I took the boat out tonight and stowed it on the island to the south, by the old tree stump.

Had a good haul this week. Another caravan or two and I can finally get out of here, and not a moment too soon.
For once, we actually caught a lucky break. With Pale Pass closed and Helgen wiped off the map, the last few soldiers up at Fort Neugrad were easy pickings. We should be able to loot the place before we have to head back. It’s not like the Jarl has time to respond.

Finally found the keys to the Fort’s old library. I sent Brandish down to scour the place. Wouldn’t normally waste the time, but I’ve heard rumour the wizards up north pay good coin for anything magical. At this point, we’ll take what we can get. There’s a ton of rotten food in the cellars, but not much else worth taking.
Bandit's Journal

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Bandit’s Journal

Damn those Giants. Just one mammoth would feed us for a month, but they herd them around like prized cattle, never taking an eye off them. We’ve hunted this area dry. Unless we get a kill soon, we’ll have to find somewhere else to camp.
The Battle of Red Mountain

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for war and death.

The Battle of Red Mountain and the Rise and Fall of the Tribunal

by Vivec

(The following is a transcript of the words of Lord Vivec, addressed to a Dissident Priest, Malur Omayn, who confronted Vivec with the Ashlanders traditions surrounding the Battle of Red Mountain and with prophecies of the Nerevarine, and to unnamed magistrates of the Inquisition who joined Vivec in interrogating the Dissident Priest).

Who can clearly recall the events of the distant past? But you have asked me to tell you, in my own words, the events surrounding the Battle of Red Mountain, the birth of the Tribunal, and the prophecies of a Nerevar reborn. Here is what I can tell you.

When the Chimer first abandoned the herds and tents of their nomadic ancestors, and built the first Great Houses, welded the Daedra, and worshipped them as gods. But our brethren, the Dwemer, scorned the Daedra, and mocked our foolish rituals, and preferred instead their gods of Reason and Logic. So the Chimer and Dwemer were always at bitter war, until the Nords came and invaded Resdayn. Only then did the Chimer and Dwemer put away their strife and joined together to cast out the invaders.

Once the Nords were driven out, General Nerevar of the Chimer and General Dumac of the Dwemer, who had come to love and respect one another, resolved to make peace between their peoples. In that time I was but a junior counsellor to Nerevar, and Nerevar’s queen, Almalexia, and his other favourite counsellor, Sotha Sil, always doubted that such a peace might long survive, given the bitter disputes between Chimer and Dwemer, but by negotiation and compromise, Nerevar and Dumac somehow managed to preserve a fragile peace.

But when Dagoth Ur, Lord of House Dagoth, and trusted as a friend by both Nerevar and the Dwemer, brought us proof that High Engineer Kagrenac of the Dwemer had discovered the Heart of Lorkhan, and that he had learned how to tap its powers, and was building a new god, a mockery of Chimer faith and a fearsome weapon, we all urged Nerevar to make war on the Dwarves and to destroy this threat to Chimer beliefs and security. Nerevar was troubled. He went to Dumac and asked if what Dagoth Ur said was true. But Kagrenac took great offence, and asked whom Nerevar thought he was, that he might presume to judge the affairs of the Dwemer.

Nerevar was further troubled, and made pilgrimage to Holamayan, the sacred temple of Azura, and Azura confirmed all that Dagoth Ur said was indeed true and that the creation of a New God of the Dwemer should be prevented at all costs. When Nerevar came back and told us what the goddess had said, we felt our judgements confirmed, and again counselled him to war, chiding Nerevar for his naive trust in friendship, and reminding Nerevar of his duty to protect the faith and security of the Chimer against the impiety and dangerous ambitions of the Dwemer.

Then Nerevar went back to Vvardenfell one last time, hoping that negotiations and compromise
might once again preserve the peace. But this time the friends Nerevar and Dumac quarrelled bitterly, and as a result, the Chimer and Dwemer went to war.

The Dwemer were well-defended by their fortress at Red Mountain, but Nerevar’s cunning drew most of Dumac’s army out into the field and pinned them there, while Nerevar, Dumac, and a small group of companions could make their way into the Heart Chamber by secret means. There, Nerevar the Chimer King met Dumac the Dwarf King and they both collapsed from grievous wounds and draining magic. With Dumac fallen, and threatened by Dagoth Ur and others, Kagrenac turned his tools upon the Heart, and Nerevar said he saw Kagrenac and all his Dwemer companions at once disappear from the world. In that instance, Dwemer everywhere disappeared without a trace.

But Kagrenac’s tools remained, and Dagoth Ur seized them, and he carried them over to Nerevar saying, “That fool Kagrenac has destroyed his own people with these things. We should destroy them, right away, lest they fall into the wrong hands.”

But Nerevar was resolved to confer with his queen and his generals, who had foreseen that this war would come and whose counsel he would not ignore again. “I will ask the Tribunal what we shall do with them, for they have had wisdom in the past that I had not. Stay here, loyal Dagoth Ur, until I return.” So Nerevar told Dagoth Ur to protect the tools and the Heart Chamber until he returned.

Then Nerevar was carried to us where we waited on the slopes of Red Mountain, and he told us all that had transpired under Red Mountain. What Nerevar had said that the Dwemer had used special tools to turn their people into immortals and that the Heart of Lorkhan had wondrous powers. (Only later did we hear from others present that Dagoth Ur had thought the Dwemer destroyed, not made immortal. And no one knows for sure what really happened there).

After hearing Nerevar, we gave our counsel as he requested, proposing, “We should preserve these tools in trust for the welfare of the Chimer people. And who knows, perhaps the Dwemer are not gone forever, but merely transported to some distant realm, from which they may some day return to threaten our security once again. Therefore, we need to keep these tools, to study them and their principles, so that we may be safe in future generations.”

And though Nerevar voiced his great misgivings, he was willing to be ruled by our counsel, under one condition: that we all together should swear a solemn oath upon Azura that the tools would never be used in the profane manner that the Dwemer had intended. We all readily agreed, and swore solemn oaths at Nerevar’s dictation.

So then we went with Nerevar back into Red Mountain and met with Dagoth Ur. Dagoth Ur refused to deliver the tools to us, saying they were dangerous, and we could not touch them. Dagoth Ur seemed to be irrational, insisting that only he could be trusted with the tools, and then we guessed that he had some how been affected by his handling of the tools, but now I feel sure that he had privately learned the powers of the tools, and had in some confused way that he must have them for himself. Then Nerevar and our guard resorted to force to secure the tools. Somehow Dagoth Ur and his retainers escaped, but we gained the tools, and delivered them to Sotha Sil for study and safe-keeping.

For some years we kept the oaths we swore to Azura with Nerevar, but during that time, in secret, Sotha Sil must have studied the tools and divined their mysteries. And at last he came to us with a vision of a new world of peace, with justice and honour for nobles, and health and prosperity for the commoners, with the Tribunal as immortal patrons and guides. And dedicating ourselves to this vision of a better world, we made a pilgrimage to Red Mountain and transformed ourselves with the power of Kagrenac’s tools.
And no sooner than we had completed our rituals and begun to discover our new-found powers, the Daedra Lord Azura appeared and cursed us for our foresworn oaths. By her powers of prophecy, she assured us that her champion, Nerevar, true to his oath, would return to punish us for our perfidy, and to make sure such profane knowledge might never again be used to mock and defy the will of the gods. But Sotha Sil said to her, “The old gods are cruel and arbitrary, and distant from the hopes and fears of mer. Your age is past. We are the new gods now, born of the flesh, and wise and caring of the needs of our people. Spare us your threats and chiding, inconstant spirit. We are bold and fresh, and will not fear you.”

And then, in that moment, all Chimer were changed into Dunmer, and our skins turned ashen and our eyes into fire. Of course, we only knew at that time that this had happened to us, but Azura said, “This is not my act, but your act. You have chosen your fate, and the fate of your people, and all the Dunmer shall share your fate, from now to the end of time. You think yourselves gods, but you are blind, and all is darkness.” And Azura left us alone, in darkness, and we were all afraid, but we put on brave faces, and went forth from Red Mountain to build the new world of our dreams.

And the new world we shaped was glorious and generous, and the worship of the Dunmer fervent and grateful. The Dunmer were at first afraid of their new faces, but Sotha Sil spoke to them, saying that it was not a curse but a blessing, a sign of their changed natures, and sign of the special favour they might enjoy as New Mer, no longer barbarians trembling before ghosts and spirits, but civilised mer, speaking directly to their immortal friends and patrons, the three faces of the Tribunal. And we were all inspired by Sotha Sil’s speech and vision, and took heart. And over time, we crafted the customs and institutions of a just and honourable society, and the land of Resdayn knew millennia of peace, equity, and prosperity unknown to other savage races.

But beneath Red Mountain, Dagoth Ur had survived. And even as the light of our bold new world shined ever more brightly, beneath Red Mountain, the darkness gathered, a darkness that was close kin to the bright light that Sotha Sil had coaxed from the Heart of Lorkhan with the Tools of Kagrenac. As the darkness grew, we fought it, and crafted walls to confine it, but we never could destroy it, for the source of the darkness was the same source as the source of our own divine inspiration.

And in these latter days of Morrowind, reduced to a subjugated province of the Western Empire, as the glory of the Temple fades, and the dark tides rises from Red Mountain, we are reminded of Azura and her promised champion’s return. We have waited, blind and in darkness, mere shadows, drained of our ardent vision, in shame of our folly, in fear of our judgement, and in hope of our deliverance. We do not know if the outlander claiming to fulfil the prophecies of the Nerevarine is our old companion Nerevar reborn, or a pawn of the Emperor, or a catspaw of Azura, or some simple twist of fate. But we insist you adhere to Temple doctrine, and conform to the strictures diving the Hierogaphra from the Apogaphra, and that you do not speak that which must not be spoken openly. Act as a dutiful priest should, in accordance with your vows of obedience to the canons and arch canons, and all will be forgiven. Defy me, and you will know what it is to stand against a god.

— Vivec
I know, I know. It's been a while since I've updated this. Just letting you all know that I'm not dead.

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for battle, trickery, deception, and treachery.

The Battle of Sacre Tor

By Anonymous

In 2E852, allied Nord and Breton forces crossed the borders into Cyrodiil and occupied the major passes and settlements in the Jerall Mountains. Making their headquarters for the winter at Sacre Tor, the Nord-Breton allies dared King Cuhlecain’s new general, Talos, to assault them in their mountain fastnesses.

When they learned that General Talos had mustered an army in the dead of winter and was marching to assault Sacre Tor, they were elated. Sacre Tor was impregnable, its citadel on high cliffs overlooking the lower city, nestled in a high mountain basin with steep, unscalable cliffs in their rear.

The Cyrodiilic army was small, poorly trained and outfitted, short on rations, and unprepared for winter campaigning. As their ragged units assembled in the lowlands beneath the citadel, the Nord-Breton allies confidently assumed that their enemy had delivered himself into their trap.

The citadel was not only protected by an unscalable cliff in front and unscalable heights in their rear, but the entrance to the citadel was magically concealed under the appearance of a large mountain lake in the basin between the heights. Accordingly, the Nord-Breton allies left on a small force to defend the citadel, descending through lower passages to attack and overwhelm the cold, hungry Cyrodiilic forces before them. They expected to defeat, overrun, and annihilate General Talos’ army, leaving no one to oppose their springtime descent into the Cyrodiilic Heartlands.

Thus did General Talos lure the Nord-Breton allies to their doom.

Leaving a weak force in the lowlands to draw out the defenders, General Talos approached the citadel of Sacre Tor from the rear, descending the supposedly unscalable heights behind the citadel, and sneaking into the supposedly magically concealed entrance to the inner citadel. This remarkable feat is attributed to the agency of a single unnamed traitor, by tradition a Breton turncoat sorcerer, who revealed both the existence of an obscure mountain trail down the heights behind the citadel and the secret of the citadel entrance beneath its illusory lake surface.

While the Cyrodiilic army in the lowlands fought a desperate defence against the Nord-Breton sortie, General Talos and his men entered the citadel, swept aside the sparse defence, captured the Nord-Breton nobles and generals, and compelled them to surrender the citadel and their armies. The confused and demoralised Nord captives, already suspicious of the scheming High Rock sorcerer aristocracy and their overreaching dreams of Heartlands conquests, deserted the alliance
and swore loyalty to Tiber Septim. The Skyrim generals joined their rank and file in Tiber Septim’s army; High Rock battlemage command was summarily executed and the captive Bretons imprisoned or sold into slavery.

Thus was the concerted allied invasion of Cyrodiil foiled, and General Talos’ army swelled by the hardened Nord veteran troops that played so crucial a role in General Talos’ succeeding campaigns which consolidated the Colovian and Nibenean into the core of the Cyrodiilic Empire, and which resulting in the crowning of General Talos as Emperor Tiber Septim.

Historians marvel at Tiber Septim’s tactical daring in assaulting a fortified mountain citadel in the dead of winter against vastly superior numbers. Later Tiber Septim attributed his unwavering resolve against overwhelming obstacles to have been inspired by his divine vision of the Amulet of Kings in the tomb of Reman III.

The young Talos may have indeed been inspired by his belief that he was fated to recover this ancient sacred symbol of the Covenant and to lead Tamriel to the high civilisation of the Third Empire. Nonetheless, this should in no way reduce our admiration for the dash and genius of this defining military triumph against impossible odds.
The Bear of Markarth

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for death, war, torture, child murder, and basically just Ulfric Stormcloak. We all know what he's like.

The Bear of Markarth: The Crimes of Ulfric Stormcloak

by Arrianus Arius, Imperial Scholar

Ulfric Stormcloak is considered a hero by many for his part in quelling the Forsworn Uprising. It is said that when the Empire abandoned Skyrim, and the natives of the Reach rebelled (undoubtedly due to the Nords’ poor treatment of them), Ulfric Stormcloak and his militia were there to retake “their” land from the Forsworn. In all the bravado and epic yarns the skalds compose of his exploits, you would think Ulfric to be a giant of a man, equal to that of Tiber Septim in his cunning, leadership, and decisive actions.

But the truth is far more revealing. Yes, from 4E 174-176, the Forsworn did in fact rule over the Reach as an independent kingdom from Skyrim. Yes, this was accomplished while the Empire was beset by Aldmeri Dominion forces and could not send the Legion to re-establish order. And yes, Ulfric Stormcloak did quell the rebellion without Imperial assistance. That much is true, but what the bards often fail to tell in their stories is that the Forsworn Kingdom was quite peaceful for those 2 years they were in power.

True, some crimes were committed against former Nord landowners (often those accused of being the harshest towards their native workers), but on the whole the Forsworn ruled their lands fairly, and were making overtures to be recognised by the Empire as a legitimate kingdom.

In the wake of the aftermath of the Great War, you can imagine the backlog on stately matters the Empire had. Before a peace treaty could be resolved with the Forsworn, a militia led by Ulfric Stormcloak sieged the gates of their capital, Markarth. What happened during the battle was war, but what happened after the battle was over is nothing short of war crimes.

Every official who worked for the Forsworn was put to the sword, even after they had surrendered. Native women were tortured to give up the names of Forsworn fighters who had fled the city or were in the hills of the Reach. Anyone who lived in the city, Forsworn and Nords alike, were executed if they had not fought with Ulfric and his men when they breached the gates. “You are with us, or you are against us, Skyrim” was the message on Ulfric’s lips as he ordered the deaths of shopkeepers, farmers, the elderly, and any child old enough to lift a sword that had failed in the call to fight with him.

So when a “grateful” Empire accepted Ulfric’s victory and sent soldiers to re-establish the rule of law in the Reach, it was no surprise that he would demand to be allowed to worship Talos freely before the Legion could enter. With chaos running through the streets of Markarth and the reports of deaths rising every day, the Empire had no choice but to grant Ulfric and his men their worship.

We allow them to worship Talos, in full violation of the White-Gold Concordat with the Aldmeri Dominion (which recognises the elven belief that Talos, as a human, cannot be one of the Divines).
In jeopardising the treaty that so many sacrificed for during the Great War, the Empire was wrong. But what choice did they have, I ask you? Against the Bear of Markarth, Ulfric Stormcloak, “no” is not an answer.
Before the Ages of Man

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for a litany of spelling mistakes written by the author, and the fact that the author is Aicantar. As in, the dude you can kill during the Thieves Guild, and the nephew of Calcelmo. I honestly didn't realise he was an author.

Timeline Series - Vol 1
Before the Ages of Man

by Aicantar of Shimmerene

Before man came to rule Tamriel, and before the chronicles of the historians recorded the affairs of the rulers of Tamriel, the events of our world are known only through myths and legends, and through the divinely inspired teachings of the Nine Divines.

For convenience, historians divide the distant ages of prehistory into two broad periods of time—the Dawn Era, and the Merethic Era.

The Dawn Era

The Dawn Era is that period before the beginning of mortal time, when the feats of the gods take place. The Dawn Era ends with the exodus of the gods and magic from the World at the founding of the Adamantine Tower.

The term ‘Merethic’ comes from the Nordic, literally, “Era of the Elves.” The Merethic Era is the prehistoric time after the exodus of the gods and magic from the World at the founding of the Adamantine Tower and before the arrival of Ysgramor the Nord in Tamriel.

The following are the most notable events of the Dawn Era, presented roughly in sequence as it must be understaoo by creatures of time such as ourselves.

The Cosmos formed from the Aurbis (chaos, or totality) by Anu and Padomay. Akatosh (Auriel) formed and Time began. The Gods (et’Ada) formed. Lorkhan convinced—or tricked—the Gods into creating the mortal plane, Nirn. The mortal plane was at this point highly magical and dangerous. As the Gods walked, the physical make-up of the mortal plane and even the timeless continuity of existence itself became unstable.

When Magic (Magnus), architect of the plans for the mortal world, decided to terminate the project, the Gods convened at the Adamantine Tower, Direnni Tower, the oldest known structure in Tamriel and decided what to do. Most left when Magic did. Others sacrificed themselves into other forms so that they might stay (the Ehlnofey). Lorkhan was condemned by the Gods to exile in the mortal realms, and his heart was torn out and cast from the Tower. Where it landed, a Volcano formed. With Magic (in the Mythic Sense) gone, the Cosmos stabilised. Elven history, finally linear, began (ME2500).
The Merethic Era was figured by early Nord scholars as a series of years numbered in reverse order backwards from the their “beginning of time”—the founding of the Camoran Dynasty, recorded as Year Zero of the First Era. The prehistoric events of the Merethic Era are listed here with their traditional Nordic Merethic dates. The earliest Merethic date cited by King Harald’s scholars was ME2500—the Nordic reckoning of the first year of time. As such, the Merethic Era extends from ME2500 in the distant past to ME1—the year before the founding of the Camoran Dynasty and the establishment of the White Gold Tower as an independent city-state.

According to King Harald’s bards, ME2500 was the date of construction of the Adamantine Tower on Balfiera Island in High Rock, the oldest known structure in Tamriel. (This corresponds roughly to the earliest historical dates given in various unpublished Elvish chronicles.)

During the early Merethic Era, the aboriginal beastpeoples of Tamriel—the ancestors of the Khajiit, Argonian, Orcish, and other beastfolk—lived in preliterate communities throughout Tamriel.

In the Middle Merethic Era, the Aldmeri (mortals of Elvish origin) refugees left their doomed and now-lost continent of Aldmeris (also known as ‘Old Ehlnofey’) and settled in southwestern Tamriel. The first colonies were distributed at wide intervals on islands along the entire coast of Tamriel. Later inland settlements were found primarily in fertile lowlands in southwest and central Tamriel. Wherever the beastfolk encountered the Elves, the sophisticated, literate, technologically advanced Aldmeri cultures displaced the primitive beastfolk into the jungles, marshes, mountains, and wastelands. The Adamantine Tower was rediscovered and captured by the Direnni, a prominent and powerful Aldmeri clan. The Crystal Tower was built on Summerset Isle and, later, White Gold Tower in Cyrodiil.

During the Middle Merethic Era, Aldmeri explorers mapped out the coasts of Vvardenfell, building the First Era High Elven wizard towers at Ald Redaynia, Bal Fell, Tel Aruhn, and Tel Mora in Morrowind. It was also during this period that Ayleid, [Wild Elven] settlements flourished in the jungles surrounding White Gold Tower (present day Cyrodiil). Wild Elves, also known as the Heartland High Elves, preserved the Dawn Era magics and language of the Ehlnofey. Ostensibly a tribute-land to the High King of Alinor, the Heartland’s long lines of communication from the Summerset Isles’ sovereignty effectively isolated Cyrodiil from the High Kings at Crystal Tower.

The Late Middle Merethic Era is the period of the High Velothi Culture. The Chimer, ancestors of the modern Dunmer, or Dark Elves, were dynamic, ambitious, long-lived Elven clans devoted to fundamentalist ancestor worship. The Chimer clans followed the Prophet Veloth out of the ancestral Elven homelands in the southwest to settle in the lands now known as Morrowind. Despising the secular culture and profane practices of the Dwemer, the Chimer also coveted the lands and resources of the Dwemer, and for centuries provoked them with minor raids and territorial disputes. The Dwemer (Dwarves), free-thinking, reclusive Elven clans devoted to the secrets of science, engineering, and alchemy, established underground cities and communities in the mountain ranges (later the Velothi Mountains) separating modern Skyrim and Morrowind.

The Late Merethic Era marks the precipitous decline of Velothi culture. Some Velothi settled in villages near declining and abandoned ancient Velothi towers. During this period, Velothi high culture disappeared on Vvardenfell island. The earliest Dwemer Freehold colonies date from this period. Degenerate Velothi devolved into tribal cultures which, in time, evolved into the modern Great Houses of Morrowind, or persisted as the barbarian Ashlander tribes. The only surviving traces of this tribal culture are scattered Velothi towers and Ashlander nomads on Vvardenfell Island. The original First Era High Elven wizard towers along the coasts of Tamriel were also
abandoned about this time.

It was in the Late Merethic Era that the pre-literate humans, the so-called “Nedic Peoples”, from the continent of Atmora (also ‘Altmora’ or ‘the Elder Wood’ in Aldmeris) migrated and settled in northern Tamriel. The Nord culture hero Ysgramor, leader of the great colonising fleet to Tamriel, is credited with developing a runic transcription of Nord speech based on Elvish principles, and so Ysgramor is considered the first human historian. Ysgramor’s fleet landed at Hsaarik Head at the extreme Northern tip of Skyrim’s Broken Cape. The Nords built there the legendary city of Saarthal. The Elves drove the Men away during the Night of Tears, but Ysgramor soon returned with his Five Hundred Companions.

Also during the Late Merethic Era the legendary immortal hero, warrior, sorceror, and king variously known as Pelinal Whitestrake, Harrald Hairy Breeks, Ysmir, Hans the Fox, etc., wandered Tamriel, gathering armies, conquering lands, ruling, then abandoning his kingdoms to walk again.
Beggar

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for labour, death, blood, abandonment, extreme shyness, homelessness, and cruelty.

Beggar

by Reven

Eslaf Erol was the of the litter of five born to the Queen of the prosperous Nordic kingdom of Erolgard, Lahpyrcopa, and her husband, the King of Erolgard, Ytluaf. During pregnancy, the Queen had been more than twice as wide as she was tall, and the act of delivery took three months and six days after it had begun. It was perhaps understandable that the Lahpyrcopa elected, upon expelling Eslaf to frown, say, ‘Good riddance,’ and die.

Like many Nords, Ytluaf did not care very much for his wife and less for his children. His subjects were puzzled, therefore, when he announced that he would follow the ancient tradition of his people of Atmora of following his beloved spouse to the grave. They had not thought they were particularly in love, nor were they aware that such tradition existed. Still, the simple people were grateful, for the little royal drama alleviated their boredom, which was and is a common problem in the more obscure parts of northern Skyrim, particularly in wintertide.

He gathered his household staff and his five fat, bawling little heirs in front of him, and divided his estate. To his son Yñohp, he gave his title; to his son Laernu, he gave his land; to his son Suoibud, he gave his fortune; to his daughter Laicifitra, he gave his army. Ytluaf’s advisors had suggested he keep the inheritance together for the good of the kingdom, but Ytluaf did not particularly care for his advisors, or the kingdom for that matter. Upon making his announcement, he drew his dagger across his throat.

One of the nurses, who was rather shy, decided to speak as the King’s life ebbed away. ‘Your highness, you forgot your fifth child, little Eslaf.’

Good Ytluaf groaned. It was somewhat hard to concentrate when there was blood gushing from one’s throat, after all. The King tried in vain to think of something to bequeath, but there was nothing left.

Finally he sputtered, irritably, ‘Eslaf should have taken something then’ and died.

That a babe but a few days old was expected to demand his rightful inheritance was arguably unfair. ut so Eslaf Erol was given his birthright with his father’s dying breath. He would have nothing, but what he had taken.

Since no one else would take him, the shy nurse, whose name was Drusba, took the baby home. It was a decrepit little shack, and over the years that followed, it became more and more decrepit. Unable to find work, Drusba sold all of her furnishings to buy food for little Eslaf. By the time he was old enough to walk and talk, she had sold the walls and the roof as well, so they had nothing but a floor to call home. And if you’ve ever been to Skyrim, you can appreciate that is scarcely
sufficient.

Drusba did not tell Eslaf the story of his birth, or that his brothers and sister were leading quite nice lives with their inheritances, for, as we have said, she was rather shy, and found it difficult to broach the subject. She was so painfully shy, in fact, that whenever he asked anything about where he came from, Drusba would run away. That was more or less her answer to everything, to flee.

In order to communicate with her at all, Eslaf learned how to run almost as soon as he could walk. He couldn’t keep up with his adopted mother at first, but in time he learned to toe-heel toe-heel if he anticipated a short but fast sprint, and heel-toe heel-toe if it seemed Drusba was headed for a long distance marathon flight. He never did get all the answers he needed from her, but Eslaf did learn how to run.

The kingdom of Erolgard had, in the years that Eslaf was growing, became quite a grim place. King Ynohp did not have a treasury, for Suoibud had been given that; he did not have any property for income, for Laernu had been given that; he did not have an army to protect the people, for Laicifitra had been given that. Furthermore, he was but a child, all the decisions in the kingdom went through Ynohp’s rather corrupt council. It had become a bureaucratic exploitative land of high taxes, rampant crime, and regular incursions from neighbouring kingdoms. Not a particularly unusual situation for a kingdom of Tamriel, but an unpleasant one nonetheless.

The time finally came when the taxcollector arrived to Drusba’s hovel, such as it was, to collect the only thing he could—the floor. Rather than protest, the poor shy maid ran away, and Eslaf never saw her again.

Without a home or a mother, Eslaf didn’t know what to do. He had grown accustomed to the cold open air in Drusba’s shack, but he was hungry.

‘May I have a piece of meat?’ he asked the butcher down the street. ‘I’m very hungry.’

The man had known the boy for years, often spoke to his wife about how sorry he felt for him, growing up in a home with no ceilings or walls. He smiled at Eslaf and said, ‘Go away, or I’ll hit you.’

Eslaf hurriedly left the butcher and went to a nearby tavern. The tavernkeeper had been a former valet in the king’s court and knew that the boy by right was a prince. Many times, he had seen the poor ragged lad in the streets, and sighed at the way fate had treated him.

‘May I have something to eat?’ Eslaf asked this tavernkeeper. ‘I’m very hungry.’

‘You’re lucky I don’t cook you up and eat you,’ replied the tavernkeeper.

Eslaf hurriedly left the tavern. For the rest of the day, the boy approached the good citizens of Erolgard, begging for food. One person had thrown something at him, but it turned out to be an inedible rock.

As night fell, a raggedy man came up to Eslaf and, without a word, handed him a piece of fruit and a piece of dried meat. The lad took it, and as he devoured it, he thanked the man very sweetly.

‘If I see you begging on the streets tomorrow,’ the man growled, ‘I’ll kill you myself. There are only so many beggars we of the guild allow in any one town, and you make it one too many. You’re ruining business.’

It was a good thing Eslaf knew how to run. He ran all night.
Eslaf Erol’s story is continued in the book Thief.
Beggar Prince

We look down upon the beggars of the Empire. These lost souls are the poor and wretched of the land. Every city has its beggars. Most are so poor that they have only the clothes on their backs. They eat the scraps the rest of us throw out. We toss them a coin so we don’t have to think too long about their plight.

Imagine my surprise when I heard the tale of the Beggar Prince. I could not imagine what a Prince of Beggars would be. Here is the tale I heard. It takes place in the first age, when the gods walked like men and daedra stalking the woods with impunity. It is a time before they were all confined to Oblivion.

There once was a man named Wheedle. Or maybe it was a woman. The story goes to great lengths to avoid declaring Wheedle’s gender. Wheedle was the 13th child of a king in Valenwood. As such Wheedle was in no position to take the throne or even inherit much property or wealth.

Wheedle had left the palace to find independent fortune and glory. After many days of endless forest roads and tiny villages, Wheedle came upon a three men surrounding a beggar. The beggar was swaddled in rags from head to toe. No portion of the vagabond’s body was visible. The men were intent on slaying the beggar. With a cry of rage and indignation, Wheedle charged the men with sword drawn. Being simple townsfolk, armed only with pitchforks and scythes, they immediately fled from the armoured figure with the shining sword.

“Many thanks for saving me,” wheezed the beggar from beneath the heap of foul rags, Wheedle could barely stand the stench.

“What’s your name, wench?” Wheedle asked.

“I am Namira.” Unlike the townsfolk, Wheedle was well learned. That name meant nothing to them, but to Wheedle it was an opportunity.

“You’re a Daedric Lord!” Wheedle exclaimed. “Why did you allow those men to harass you? You could have slain them all with a whisper.”

“I am pleased you recognised me,” Namira rasped. “I am frequently reviled by townsfolk. It pleases me to be recognised for my attribute, if not for my name.”
Wheedle knew that Namira was the Daedric Lord of all things gross and repulsive. Diseases such as leprosy and gangrene were her domain. Where the others might have seen danger, Wheedle saw opportunity. “Oh, great Namira, let me apprentice myself to you, I ask only that you grant me powers to make my fortune and forge a name for myself that will live through the ages.”

“Nay, I make my way alone in the world, I have no need for apprentice.” Namira shambled off down the road. Wheedle would not be put off. With a bound, Wheedle was at Namira’s heel, pressing the case for an apprenticeship. For 33 days and nights, Wheedle kept up the debate. Namira said nothing, but Wheedle’s voice was ceaseless. Finally, on the 33rd day, Wheedle was too hoarse to talk. Namira looked back on the suddenly silent figure. Wheedle knelt in the mud at her feet, open hands raised in supplication. “It would seem you have completed your apprenticeship to me after all.” Namira declared, “I shall grant your request.” Wheedle was overjoyed.

“I grant you the power of disease. You may choose to be afflicted with any disease you choose, changing them at will, so long as it has visible symptoms. However, you must always bear at least one. I grant you the power of pity. You may evoke pity in anyone that sees you. Finally, I grant you the power of disregard. You may cause others to disregard your presence.”

Wheedle was aghast. These were not boons from which a fortune could be made. They were curses, each awful in its own right, but together they were unthinkable. “How am I to make my fortune and forge a name for myself with these terrible gifts?”

“As you begged at my feet for 33 days and 33 nights, so shall you beg for your fortunes in the cities of men. Your name will become legendary among the beggars of Tamriel. The story of Wheedle, the Prince of Beggars, shall be handed down throughout the generations.”

It was as Namira predicted, Wheedle was an irresistible beggar. None could see the wretch without desperately wanting to toss a coin at the huddled form. However, Wheedle also discovered that power of disregard gave great access to the secrets of the realms. People unknowingly said important things where Wheedle could hear them. Wheedle grew to know the comings and goings of every citizen in the city.

To this day, it is said that if you really want to know something, go ask the beggars. They have eyes and ears throughout the cities. They know all the secrets of the daily lives of its citizens.
The Beginner's Guide to Homesteading

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Not a trigger, but a warning that this reads almost like an infomercial. Also there's a lot of breaks.

The Beginner’s Guide to Homesteading

by Anonymous

If you’re like most people, you’ve always dreamed of owning your own steading and building your own home. But where to start? Never fear, you hold in your hands the guide to everything you need to know. Before long, you’ll be gazing complacently across your well-tended lands from the porch of your own manor house.

Getting Started

There are two vital pieces of equipment that the prospective homeowner needs: the Drafting Table and the Carpenter’s Workbench.

Your Drafting Table is where you’ll lay out the plans for each stage of your new house. Don’t worry about making a mistake here—you can always change your mind, and making a new plan costs you nothing. Remember: measure twice and cut once.

Your Carpenter’s Workbench is where you’ll do the actual construction. Once you’ve settled on a plan at the Drafting Table, you can start building your house at the Carpenter’s Workbench. Avoid the common beginner’s mistake—don’t try to build the roof without building the proper supports first!

Space for the Family

If you have a spouse or children, you’ll certainly want to get the house in a liveable state as soon as possible. Your loving spouse will no doubt make do with nothing more than a roof over her head and a bed to sleep in, but what about the children? Don’t worry—all they need is a bed and a chest or dresser to store their treasures, and they will be perfectly content.

Building Materials

You will need a lot of supplies to complete your house, but it isn’t necessary to gather everything you need ahead of time. Unless you’re in a hurry, you can just build in stages as materials become available. You’ll enjoy watching your house progress from dream to reality.

The most common materials you’ll need are sawn logs, cut stone, and clay. Luckily, these are plentiful in Skyrim—in fact, most building sites will have one or more easily accessible sources of clay and stone. For sawn lumber, any lumber mill owner will be glad to sell and deliver as much as
you need.

You’ll need a lot of nails—fortunately even a novice blacksmith will soon find themselves turning iron into nails with ease.

When you turn to furnishing your completed house, you’ll need a much wider variety of materials. Some of them, such as straw or glass, are commonly obtained from general goods stores. For the rest—the whole of Skyrim will become your general store!

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**Hiring a Steward**

Once your estate is well-established, you may wish to consider hiring a steward to help manage your affairs. A good steward can be invaluable—from hiring a carriage driver to buying a cow to keeping you supplied with building materials—freeing you to enjoy the fruits of your labours.

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**Building your House**

The rest of this guide will review plans for each room that you might want to build.

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**Small House**

Before you get too ambitious, gain confidence by building this tiny cottage. It is the perfect starter home, and might turn out to be all you need. But don’t worry—if you decide to keep building, you can remodel this into an entry way to the rest of your house.

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**Main Hall**

You may decide the Small House is not enough—perhaps you need more room for a growing family? The next step is to add a Main Hall, which will turn your cottage into an imposing manor house: two floors, including space for two small bedrooms a back room and a large dining area.

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**Additions**

Once you’ve built a Main Hall, your options become almost limitless—you now have room to add three more additional wings, if you decide you still need space.

For each wing, you have three choices of what to build, giving a total of nine possible additions! (But remember—you can only build three of them, so choose wisely.)

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**West Wing—Bedrooms**

The Bedroom addition is perfect if you have a family who needs more comfortable living quarters than the Main Hall affords. The Bedroom has space for a master bedroom plus two children’s beds, as well as all the dressers, wardrobes, etc. that anyone could desire. This addition also includes a spacious exterior porch.

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**West Wing—Greenhouse**
Perhaps you are a gardener at heart? If so, the greenhouse provides room for planters where you can grow almost whatever you wish, sheltered from Skyrim’s harsh climate. Tend and harvest your crops from the comfort of your own home!

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**West Wing—Enchanter’s Tower**

If your interests lie in the magical realm, this tower addition is for you. Conduct your research in privacy and comfort. Plenty of space for keeping your collection and artefacts organised. And the view from the tower is guaranteed to take your breath away.

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**North Wing—Storage Room**

If you simply need more space to store your many possessions and collections, build yourself a Storage Room. The included porch can even be connected to the porch on the East or West wings, if you build the Bedroom or Armoury additions.

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**North Wing—Trophy Room**

Are you a big game hunter who wants to show off your prizes? The Trophy Room provides space for displaying up to seven magnificent mounted specimens of your choice, sure to amaze and impress your guests.

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**North Wing—Alchemy Tower**

Perfect for the aspiring alchemist, this tower addition will give you plenty of space and storage to hone your craft in comfort. And when you need a break from brewing potions, enjoy the view from the tower roof.

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**East Wing—Armoury**

If you like nothing better than to spend a day hammering metal, or are a simple collector of armour and weapons, the Armoury is for you. With space for smighting, as well as plenty of room to display your martial collections in style, the Armoury is the perfect addition to any house.

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**East Wing—Kitchen**

The Kitchen provides everything you need to pursue the highest of culinary arts. Tired of cooking everything in a pot over the fire? You can even equip it with a new-fangled oven!

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**East Wing—Library**

The Library tower is sure to please those who value literature. With space for all the bookshelves you could desire, you’ll be able to enjoy your collection of books in style. Or perhaps take a book to the tower roof and enjoy the view of your steading?
Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

This is a beautiful poem that I've never read before, because I've never given the book to Urag gro-Shub or Calcelmo, and now I wish I did earlier. It details the Snow Elves slow descent into becoming the Betrayed.

I wish I'd read it earlier.

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The Betrayed

_by Engwe Emeloth_
_Translated by Calcelmo_

And when the snow prince fell to the ground.
The ice elves divided above and below.
Now vanquished and brutally bound.
One moment had shattered all they did know.

The once cool wind on their skin.
Now replaced with the heat of the flame.
And a pride once felt deep within.
Forgotten along with their name.

Torn from their home of ice and frost.
Thrown into the pitch black dread of night.
Living in fear as their minds become lost.
As their eyes began dimming the light.

Chained and enslaved.
What once was light turned to blackness.
Alone and betrayed.
Sinking deeper into madness.
Late in the Second Era, a girl-child, Barenziah, was born to the rulers of kingdom of Mournhold in what is now the Imperial Province of Morrowind. She was reared in all the luxury befitting a royal Dark Elven child until she reached five years of age. At that time, His Excellency Tiber Septim, the first Emperor of Tamriel, demanded that the decadent rulers of Morrowind yield to him and institute imperial reforms. Trusting to their vaulted magic, the Dark Elves impudently refused until Tiber Septim’s army was on the borders. An Armistice was hastily signed by the now-eager Dunmer, but not before there were several battles, one of which laid waste to Mournhold, now called Almalexia.

Little Princess Barenziah and her nurse were found among the wreckage. The Imperial General Symmachus, himself a Dark Elf, suggested to Tiber Septim that the child might someday be valuable, and she was therefore placed with a loyal supporter who had recently retired from the Imperial Army.

Sven Advensen had been granted the title of Count upon his retirement; his fiefdom, Darkmoor, was a small town in central Skyrim. Count Sven and his wife reared the princess as their own daughter, seeing to it that she was educated appropriately—and more importantly, that the Imperial virtues of obedience, discretion, loyalty, and piety were instilled in the child. In short, she was made fit to take her place as a member of the new ruling class of Morrowind.

The girl Barenziah grew in beauty, grace, and intelligence. She was sweet-tempered, a joy to her adoptive parents and their five young sons, who loved her as their older sister. Other than her appearance, she differed from young girls of her class only in that she had strong empathy for the woods and fields, and was wont to escape her duties to wander there at times.

Barenziah was happy and content until her sixteenth year, when a wicked orphan stable-boy, whom she had befriended out of pity, told her he had overheard a conspiracy between her guardian, Count Sven, and a Redguard visitor to sell her as a concubine in Rihad, as no Nord or Breton would marry her on account of her black skin, and no Dark Elf would have her because of her foreign upbringing.

“Whatever shall I do?” the poor girl said, weeping and trembling, for she had brought up in innocence and trust, and it never occurred to her that her friend the stable-boy would lie to her.

The wicked boy, who was called Straw, said that she must run away if she valued her virtue, but that he would come with her as her protector. Sorrowfully, Barenziah agreed to this plan; and that very night, she disguised herself as a boy and the pair escaped to the nearby city of Whiterun. After a few days there, they managed to get jobs as guards for a disreputable merchant caravan. The
caravan was headed east by side roads a mendacious attempt to elude the lawful tolls charged on the Imperial highways. Thus the pair eluded pursuit until they reached the city of Riften, where they ceased their travels for a time. They felt safe in Riften, close as it was to the Morrowind border so that Dark Elves were enough of a common sight.
Biography of Barenziah, v2

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Biography of Queen Barenziah, Vol 2

by Stern Gamboge, Imperial Scribe

The first volume of this series told the story of Barenziah’s origin-heiress to the throne of Mournhold until her father rebelled against His Excellency Tiber Septim and brought ruin to the province of Morrowind. Thanks largely to the benevolence of the Emperor, the child Barenziah was not destroyed with her parents, but reared by Count Sven of Darkmoor, a loyal Imperial trustee. She grew up into a beautiful and pious child, trustful of her guardian’s care. This trust, however, was exploited by a wicked orphan stable boy at Count Sven’s estate, who with lies and fabrications tricked her into fleeing Darkmoor with him when she turned sixteen. After many adventures on the road, they settled in Riften, a Skyrim city near the Morrowind borders.

The stable boy, Straw, was not altogether evil. He loved Barenziah in his own selfish fashion, and deception was the only way he could think of that would cement possession of her. She, of course, felt only friendship toward him, but he was hopeful that she would gradually change her mind. He wanted to buy a small farm and settle down into a comfortable marriage, but at the time his earnings were barely enough to feed and shelter them.

After only a short time in Riften, Straw fell in with a bold, villainous Khajiit thief named Therris, who proposed that they rob the Imperial Commandant’s house in the central part of the city. Therris said he had a client, a traitor to the Empire, who would pay well for any information they could gather there. Barenziah happened to overhear this plan and was appalled. She stole away from their rooms and walked the streets of Riften in desperation, torn between her loyalty to the Empire and her love of her friends.

In the end, loyalty to the Empire prevailed over personal friendship, and she approached the Commandant’s house, revealed her true identity, and warned him of her friends’ plan. The Commandant listened to her tale, praised her courage, and assured her that no harm would come to her. He was none other than General Symmachus, who had been scouring the countryside in search of her disappearance, and had just arrived in Riften, hot in pursuit. He took her into his custody, and informed her that, far from being sent away to be sold, she was to be reinstated as the Queen of Mournhold as soon as she turned eighteen. Until that time, she was to live with the Septim family in the newly built Imperial City, where she would learn something of government and presented at the Imperial Court.

At the Imperial City, Barenziah befriended the Emperor Tiber Septim during the middle years of his reign. Tiber’s children, particularly his oldest son and heir Pelagius, came to love her as a sister. The ballads of the day praised her beauty, chastity, wit, and learning. On her eighteenth birthday, the entire Imperial City turned out to watch her farewell procession preliminary to her return to her native land. Sorrowful as they were at her departure, all knew she was ready for her glorious destiny as sovereign of the kingdom of Mournhold.
Thanks for reading reviewing. Trigger warnings for death, the passing of time, and everything that happened with the Imperial Simulacrum.

**Biography of Queen Barenziah, Vol 3**

*by Stern Gamboge, Imperial Scribe*

In the second volume of this series, it was told how Barenziah was kindly welcome to the newly constructed Imperial City by the Emperor Tiber Septim and his family, who treated her like a long-lost daughter during her almost one-year stay. After several happy months there learning her duties as vassal queen under the Empire, the Imperial General Symmachus escorted her to Mournhold where she took up her duties as Queen of her people under his wise guidance. Gradually they came to love one another and were married and crowned in a splendid ceremony at which the Emperor himself officiated.

After several hundred years of marriage, a son, Helseth, was born to the royal couple amid celebration and joyous prayer. Although it was not publicly known at the time, it was shortly before this blessed event that the Staff of Chaos had been stolen from its hiding place deep in the Mournhold mines by a clever, enigmatic bard known only as the Nightingale.

Eight years after Helseth’s birth, Barenziah bore a daughter, Morgiah of Firsthold, named after General Symmachus’ mother, and the royal couple’s joy seemed complete. Alas, shortly after that, relations with the Empire mysteriously deteriorated, leading to much civil unrest in Mournhold. After fruitless investigations and attempts at reconciliation, in despair took her young children and travelled to the Imperial City herself to seek the ear of then Emperor Uriel Septim VII. General Symmachus remained in Mournhold to deal with the grumbling peasants and annoyed nobility, and do what he could to stave off an impending insurrection.

During her audience with the Emperor, Barenziah, through her magical arts, came to realise to her horror and dismay that the so-called Emperor was an imposter, none other than the bard Nightingale who had stolen the Staff of Chaos. Exercising great self-control she concealed this realisation from him. That evening, news came that General Symmachus had fallen in battle with the revolting peasants of Mournhold, and that the kingdom had been taken over by the rebels. Barenziah, at this point, did not know where to seek help, or from whom.

The gods, that fateful night, were evidently looking out for her as if in redress of her loss. King Eadwyre, of High Rock, an old friend of Uriel Septim and Symmachus, came by on a social call. He comforted her, pledged his friendship—and furthermore, confirmed her suspicions that the Emperor was indeed a fraud, and none other than Jagar Tharn, the Imperial Battlemage, and one of the Nightingale’s many alter egos. Tharn had supposedly retired into seclusion from public work and installed his assistant, Ria Silmane, in his stead. The hapless assistant was later put to death under mysterious circumstances—supposedly a plot implicating her had been uncovered, and she had been summarily executed. However, her ghost had appeared to Eadwyre in a dream and revealed to him that the true Emperor had been kidnapped by Tharn and imprisoned in an alternate
dimension. Tharn had then used the Staff of Chaos to kill her when she attempted to warn the Elder Council of his nefarious plot.

Together, Eadwyre and Barenziah plotted to gain the false Emperor’s confidence. Meanwhile, another friend of Ria’s, known only as the Champion, who apparently possessed great, albeit untapped, potential, was incarcerated at the Imperial Dungeons. However, she had access to his dreams, and she told him to bide his time until she could devise a plan that would effect his escape. Then he could begin on his mission to unmask the imposter.

Barenziah continued to charm, and eventually befriended, the ersatz Emperor. By contriving to read his secret diary, she learned that he had broken the Staff of Chaos into eight pieces and hidden them in far-flung locations scattered across Tamriel. She managed to obtain a copy of the key to Ria’s friend’s cell and bribed a guard to leave it there as if by accident. Their Champion, whose name was unknown even to Barenziah and Eadwyre, made his way through a shift gate Ria had opened in an obscure corner of the Imperial Dungeons using her already failing powers. The Champion was free at last, and almost immediately went to work.

It took Barenziah several more months to learn the hiding places of all eight Staff pieces through snatches of overheard conversation and rare glances at Tharn’s diary. Once she had the vital information, however—which she communicated to Ria forthwith, who in turn passed it on to the Champion—she and Eadwyre lost no time. They fled to Wayrest, his ancestral kingdom in the province of High Rock, where they managed to fend off sporadic efforts of Tharn’s henchmen to haul them back to the Imperial City, or at the very least obtain revenge. Tharn, whatever else might be said of him, was no one’s fool—save perhaps Barenziah’s—and he concentrated most of his efforts toward tracking down and destroying the Champion.

As all now know, the courageous, indefatigable, and forever nameless Champion was successful in reuniting the eight sundered pieces of the Staff of Chaos. With it, he destroyed Tharn and rescued the true Emperor, Uriel Septim VII. Following what has come to be known as the Restoration, a grand state memorial service was held for Symmachus at the Imperial City, befitting the man who had served the Septim Dynasty for so long and so well.

Barenziah and good King Eadwyre had come to care deeply for one another during their trials and adventures, and were married in the same year shortly after their flight from the Imperial City. Her two children from her previous marriage with Symmachus remained with her, and a regent was appointed to rule Mournhold in her absence.

Up to the present time, Queen Barenziah has been in Wayrest with Prince Helseth and Princess Morgiah. She plans to return to Mournhold after Eadwyre’s death. Since he was already elderly when they wed, she knows that that event, alas, could not be far off as Elves reckon time. Until then, she shared the government of the kingdom of Wayrest with her husband, and seems glad and content with her finally quiet, and happily unremarkable, life.
Biography of the Wolf Queen

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for war, death, murder, familial murder, and necromancy.

Biography of the Wolf Queen

by Katar Eriphanes

Few historic figures are viewed as unambiguously evil, but Potema, the so-called Wolf Queen of Solitude, surely qualifies for that dishonour. Born to the Imperial Family in the sixty-seventh year of the Third Era, Potema was immediately presented to her grandfather, the Emperor Uriel Septim II, a famously kindhearted man, who viewed the solemn, intense babe and whispered, “She looks like a she-wolf about ready to pounce.”

Potema’s childhood in the Imperial City was certainly difficult from the start. Her father, Prince Pelagius Septim, and her mother, Qizara, showed little affection for their brood. Her eldest brother Antiochus, sixteen at Potema’s birth, was already a drunkard and a womaniser, infamous in the Empire. Her younger brothers Cephorus and Magnus were born much later, so for years she was the only child in the Imperial Court.

By the age of 14, Potema was a famous beauty with many suitors, but she was married to cement relations with King Mantiarco of the Nordic kingdom of Solitude. She entered the court, it was said, as a pawn, but she quickly became a queen. The elderly King Mantiarco loved her and allowed her all the power she wished, which was total.

When Uriel Septim II died the following year, her father was made emperor, and he faced a greatly depleted treasury, thanks to his father’s poor management. Pelagius Septim dismissed the Elder Council, forcing them to buy back their positions. In 3E 97, after many miscarriages, the Queen of Solitude gave birth to a son, who she named Uriel after her grandfather. Mantiarco quickly made Uriel his heir, but the Queen had much larger ambitions for her child.

Two years later, Pelagius Septim died—many say poisoned by a vengeful former Council member—and his son, Potema’s brother Antiochus took the throne. At age forty-eight, it could be said that Antiochus’s wild seeds had yet to be sown, and the history books are nearly pornographic in their depictions of life at the Imperial court during the yers of his reign. Potema, whose passion was for power not fornication, was scandalised every time she visited the Imperial City.

Mantiarco, King of Solitude, died the springtide after Pelagius Septim. Uriel ascended to the throne, ruling jointly with his mother. Doubtless, Uriel had the right and would have preferred to rule alone, but Potema convinced him that his position was only temporary. He would have the Empire, not merely the kingdom. In Castle Solitude, she entertained dozens of diplomats from other kingdoms of Skyrim, sowing seeds of discontent. Her guest list over the years expanded to include kings and queens of High Rock and Morrowind as well.

For thirteen years, Antiochus ruled Tamriel, and proved an able leader despite his moral laxity. Several historians point to proof that Potema cast the spell that ended her brother’s life, but
evidence one way or another was lost in the sands of time. In any event, both she and her son Uriel were visiting the Imperial court in 3E 112 when Antiochus died, and immediately challenged the rule of his daughter and heir, Kintyra.

Potema’s speech to the Elder Council is perhaps helpful to students of public speaking.

She began with flattery and self-abasement: “My most august and wise friends, members of the Elder Council, I am but a provincial queen, and I can only assume to bring to issue what you yourselves must have already pondered.”

She continued on to praise the late Emperor, who was a popular ruler in spite of his flaws: “He was a true Septim and a great warrior, destroying—with your counsel—the near invincible armada of Pyandonea.”

But little time was wasted, before she came to her point: “The Empress Magna unfortunately did nothing to temper my brother’s lustful spirits. In point of fact, no whore in the slums of the city spread out on more beds than she. Had she attended to her duties in the Imperial bedchamber more faithfully, we would have a true heir to the Empire, not the halfwit, milksop bastards who call themselves the Emperor’s children. The girl called Kintyra is popularly believed to be the daughter of Magna and the Captain of the Guard. It may be that she is the daughter of Magna and the boy who cleans the cistern. We can never know for certain. Not as certainly as we can know the lineage of my son, Uriel. The last of the Septim Dynasty.”

Despite Potema’s eloquence, the Elder Council allowed Kintyra to assume the throne as the Empress Kintyra II. Potema and Uriel angrily returned to Skyrim and began assembling a rebellion.

Details of the War of the Red Diamond are included in other histories: we need not recount the Empress Kintyra II’s capture and eventual execution in High Rock in the year 3E 114, nor the ascension of Potema’s son, Uriel III, seven years later. Her surviving brothers, Cephorus and Magnus, fought the Emperor and his mother for years, tearing the Empire apart in a civil war.

When Uriel III fought his uncle Cephorus in Hammerfell at the Battle of Ichidag in 3E 127, Potema was fighting her other brother, Uriel’s uncle Magnus in Skyrim at the Battle of Falconstar. She received word of her son’s defeat and capture just as she was preparing to mount an attack on Magnus’s weakest flank. The sixty-one-year-old Wolf Queen flew into a rage and led the assault herself. It was a success, and Magnus and his army fled. In the midst of the victory celebration, Potema heard the news that her son the Emperor had been killed by an angry mob before he had even made it for trial in the Imperial City. He had been burned to death within his carriage.

When Cephorus was proclaimed Emperor, Potema’s fury was terrible to behold. She summoned daedra to fight for her, had her necromancers resurrect her fallen enemies as undead warriors, and mounted attack after attack on the forces of the Emperor Cephorus I. Her allies began leaving her as her madness grew, and her only companions were the zombies and skeletons she had amassed over the years. The kingdom of Solitude became a land of death. Stories of the ancient Wolf Queen being waited on by rotting skeletal chambermaids and holding war plans with vampiric generals terrified her subjects.

Potema died after a month long siege of her castle in the year 3E 137 at the age of 70. While she lived, she had been the Wolf Queen of Solitude, Daughter of the Emperor Pelagius Septim, Wife of King Mantiarco, Aunt of the Empress Kintyra II, Mother of Emperor Uriel III, and Sister of the Emperors Antiochus and Cephorus. Three years after her death, Cephorus died, and his—and Potema’s—brother Magnus took the throne.

Her death has hardly diminished her notoriety. Though there is little direct evidence of this, some
theologians maintain that her spirit was so strong, she became a daedra after her death, inspiring mortals to mad ambition and treason. It is also said that her madness so infused Castle Solitude that it infected the next king to rule there. Ironically, that was her 18-year-old nephew Pelagius, the son of Magnus. Whatever the truth of the legend, it is undeniable that when Pelagius left Solitude in 3E 145 to assume the title of Emperor Pelagius Septim III, he quickly became known as Pelagius the Mad. It is even widely rumoured that he murdered his father Magnus.

The Wolf Queen must surely have had the last laugh.
I was young when the Duchess of Woda hired me as an assistant footman at her summer palace. My experience with the ways of the titled aristocracy was very limited before that day. There were wealthy merchants, traders, diplomats, and officials who had large operations in Eldenroot, and ostentatious palaces for entertaining, but my relatives were all far from those social circles.

There was no family business for me to enter when I reached adulthood, but my cousin heard that an estate far from the city required servants. It was so remotely located that there were unlikely to be many applicants for the positions. I walked for five days into the jungles of Valenwood before I met a group of riders going my direction. They were three Bosmer men, one Bosmer woman, two Breton women, and a Dunmer man, adventurers from the look of them.

“Are you also going to Moliva?” asked Prolyssa, one of the Breton women, after we had made our introductions.

“I don’t know what that is,” I replied. “I’m seeking a domestic position with the Duchess of Woda.”

“We’ll take you to her gate,” said the Dunmer Missun Akin, pulling me up to his horse. “But you would be wise not to tell Her Grace that students from Moliva escorted you. Not unless you really don’t want the position in her service.”

Akin explained himself as we rode on. Moliva was the closest village to the Duchess’s estate, where great and renowned archer had retired after a long life of military service. His name was Hiomaste, and though he was retired, he had begun to accept students who wished to learn the art of the bow. In time, when word spread of the great teacher, more and more students arrived to learn from the Master. The Breton woman had come all the way down from the Western Reach of High Rock. Akin himself had journeyed across the continent from his home near the great volcano in Morrowind. He showed me the ebony arrows he had brought from his homeland. I had never seen anything so black.

“From what we’ve heard,” said Kopale, one of the Bosmer men, “the Duchess is an Imperial whose family has been here even before the Empire was formed, so you might think that she was accustomed to the common people of Valenwood. Nothing could be further from the truth. She despises the village, and the school most of all.”

“I suppose she wants to control all the traffic in her jungle,” laughed Prolyssa.

I accepted the information with gratitude, and found myself dreading more and more my first meeting with the intolerant Duchess. My first sight of the palace through the trees did nothing to
assuage my fears.

It was nothing like any building I had seen in Valenwood. A vast edifice of stone and iron, with a jagged row of battlements like the jaws of a great beast. Most of the trees near the palace had been hewn away long ago; I could only imagine the scandal that must have caused, and what fear the Bosmer peasants must have had of the Duchy of Woda to have allowed it. In their stead was a wide grey-green moat circling in a ring around the palace, so it seemed to be on a perfect if artificial island. I had seen such sights in tapestries from High Rock and the Imperial Province, but never in my homeland.

“There’ll be a guard at the gate, so we’ll leave you here,” said Akin, stopping his horse on the road. “It’d be best for you if you weren’t damned by association with us.”

I thanked my companions, and wished them good luck with their schooling. They rode on and I followed on foot. In a few minutes’ time, I was at the front gate, which I noticed was linked to tall and ornate railings to keep the compound secure. When the gate-keeper understood that I was there to inquire about a domestic position, he allowed me past and signalled to another guard across to open the lawn to extend the drawbridge and allow me to cross the moat.

There was one last security measure: the front door. An iron monstrosity with the Woda Coat of Arms across the top, reinforced by more strips of iron, and a single golden keyhole. The man standing guard unlocked the door and gave me passage into the huge gloomy grey stone palace.

Her Grace greeted me in the drawing room. She was thin and wrinkled like a reptile, cloaked in a simple red gown. It was obvious that she never smiled. Our interview consisted of a single question.

“Do you know anything about being a junior footman in the employment of an Imperial noblewoman?” Her voice was like ancient leather.

“No, Your Grace.”

“Good. No servant ever understands what needs to be done, and I particularly dislike those who think they do. You’re engaged.”

Life at the palace was joyless, but the position of junior footman was very undemanding. I had nothing to do on most days except to stay out of the Duchess’s sight. At such times, I usually walked two miles down the road to Moliva. In some ways, there was nothing special or unusual about the village—there are thousands of identical places in Valenwood. But on the hillside nearby was Master Hiomaste’s archery academy, and I would often take my luncheon and watch the practise.

Prolyssa and Akin would sometimes meet me afterwards. With Akin, the subjects of conversation very seldom strayed far from archery. Though I was very fond of him, I found Prolyssa a more enchanting companion, not only because she was pretty for a Breton, but also because she seemed to have interests outside the realm of marksmanship.

“There’s a circus in High Rock I saw when I was a little girl called the Quill Circus,” she said during one of our walks through the woods. “They’ve been around for as long as anyone can remember. You have to see them if you ever can. They have plays, and sideshows, and the most amazing acrobats and archers you’ve ever seen. That’s my dream, to join them some day when I’m good enough.”

“How will you know when you’re a good enough archer?” I asked.
She didn’t answer, and when I turned, I realised that she had disappeared. I looked around, bewildered, until I heard laughter from the tree above me. She was perched on a branch, grinning.

“I may not join as an archer, maybe I’ll join as an acrobat,” she said. “Or maybe as both. I figured that Valenwood would be the place to go to see what I could learn. You’ve got all those great teachers to imitate in the trees here. Those ape men.”

She coiled up, bracing her left leg before springing forward on her right. In a second, she had leapt across to a neighbouring branch. I found it difficult to keep talking to her.

“The Imga, you mean?” I stammered. “Aren’t you nervous up at that height?”

“It’s a cliche, I know,” she said, jumping to an even higher branch, “but the secret is not to ever look down.”

“Would you mind coming down?”

“I probably should anyhow,” she said. She was a good thirty feet up now, balancing herself, arms outstretched, on a very narrow branch. She gestured toward the gate just barely visible on the other side of the road. “This tree is actually as close as I want to get to your Duchess’s palace.”

I held back a gasp as she dove off the branch, somersaulting until she landed on the ground, knees slightly bent. That was the trick, she explained. Anticipating the blow before it happened. I expressed to her my confidence that she would be a great attraction at the Quill Circus. Of course, I know now that never was to be.

On that day, as I recall, I had to return early. It was one of those rare occasions when I had work, of a sort, to do. Whenever the Duchess had guests, I was to be at the palace. That is not to say that I had any particular duties, except to be seen standing at attention in the dining room. The stewards and maids worked hard to bring in the food and clear the plates afterwards, but the footmen were purely decorative, a formality.

But at least I was an audience for the drama to come.
On the last dinner in my employ at the palace, the Duchess, quite surprisingly, had invited the mayor of Moliva and Master Hiomaste among her other guests. The servants’ gossip was manic. The mayor had been there before, albeit very irregularly, but Hiomaste’s presence was unthinkable. What could she mean by such a conciliatory gesture?

The dinner itself progressed along with perfect if slightly cool civility among all parties. Hiomaste and the Duchess were very quiet. The Mayor tried to engage the group in a discussion of the Emperor Pelagius IV’s new son and heir Uriel, but it failed to spark much interest. Lady Villea, elderly but much more vivacious than her sister the Duchess, led most of the talk about crime and scandal in Eldenroot.

“I have been encouraging her to move out to the country, away from all that unpleasantness for years now,” the Duchess said, meeting the eyes of the Mayor. “We’ve been discussing the possibility of her building a palace on Moliva Hill, but there’s so little space there as you know. Fortunately, we’ve come to a discovery. There is a wide field just a few days west, on the edge of the river, ideally suited.”

“It sounds perfect,” the Mayor smiled and turned to Lady Villea: “When will your ladyship begin building?”

“The very day you move your village to the site,” replied the Duchess of Woda.

The Mayor turned to her to see if she was joking. She obviously was not.

“Think of how much commerce you could bring to your village if you were close to the river,” said Lady Villea jovially. “And Master Hiomaste’s students could have more access to his fine school. Everyone would benefit. I know it would put my sister’s heart to ease if there was less trespassing and poaching on her lands.”

“There is no poaching or trespassing on your lands now, Your Grace,” frowned Hiomaste. “You do not own the jungle, nor will you. The villagers may be persuaded to leave, that I don’t know. But my school will stay where it is.”

The dinner party never really recovered happily. Hiomaste and the Mayor excused themselves, and my services, such as they were, were not needed in the drawing room where the group went to have their drinks. There was no laughter to be heard through the walls that evening.
The next day, even though there was a dinner planned for the evening, I left on my usual walk to Moliva. Before I had even reached the drawbridge, the guard held me back: “Where are you going, Gorgic? Not to the village, are you?”

“Why not?”

He pointed to the plume of smoke in the distance: “A fire broke out very early this morning, and it’s still going. Apparently, it started at Master Hiomaste’s school. It looks like the work of some travelling brigands.”

“Blessed Stendarr!” I cried. “Are the students alive?”

“No one knows, but it’d be a miracle if any survived. It was late and most everyone was sleeping. I know they’ve already found the Master’s body, or what was left of it. And they also found that girl, your friend, Prolyssa.”

I spent the day in a state of shock. It seemed inconceivable what my instinct told me: that the two noble old ladies, Lady Villea and the Duchess of Woda, had arranged for a village and school that irritated them to be reduced to ashes. At dinner, they mentioned the fire in Moliva briefly, as if it were not news at all. But I did see the Duchess smile for the first time ever. It was a smile I will never forget until the day I die.

The next morning, I had resolved to go to the village and see if I could be of any assistance to the survivors. I was passing through the servants’ hall to the grand foyer when I heard the sound of a group of people up ahead. The guards and most of the servants were there, pointing at the portrait of the Duchess that hung in the centre of the hall.

There was a single black bolt of ebony piercing the painting, right at the Duchess’s heart.

I recognised it at once. It was one of Missun Akin’s arrows that I had seen in his quiver, forged, he said, in the bowels of Dagoth-Ur itself. My first reaction was relief: the Dunmer who had been kind enough to give me a ride to the palace had survived the fire. My second reaction was echoed by all present in the hall. How had the vandal gotten past the guards, the gate, the moat, and the massive iron door?

The Duchess, arriving shortly after I, was clearly furious, though she was too well bred to show it but by raising her web-thin eyebrows. She wasted no time in assigning all her servants to new duties to keep the palace grounds guarded at all times. We were given regular shifts and precise, narrow patrols.

The next morning, despite all precautions, there was another black arrow piercing the Duchess’s portrait.

So it continued for a week’s time. The Duchess saw to it that at least one person was always present in the foyer, but somehow the arrow always found its way to her painting whenever the guard’s eyes were momentarily averted.

A complex series of signals were devised, so each patrol could report back any sounds or disturbances they encountered during their vigil. At first, the Duchess arranged them so her castellan would receive record of any disturbances during the day, and the chief of the guard during the night. But when she found that she could not sleep, she made certain that the information came to her directly.

The atmosphere in the palace had shifted from gloomy to nightmarish. A snake would slither
across the moat, and suddenly Her Grace would be tearing through the east wing to investigate. A strong gust of wind ruffling the leaves on one of the few trees on the lawn was a similar emergency. An unfortunate lone traveller on the road in front of the palace, a completely innocent man as it turned out, brought such a violent reaction that he must have thought that he had stumbled on a war. In a way, he had.

And every morning, there was a new arrow in the front hall, mocking her.

I was given the terrible assignment of guarding the portrait for a few hours in the early morning. Not wanting to be the one to discover the arrow, I seated myself in a chair opposite, never letting my eyes move away for even a second. I don’t know if you’ve had the experience of watching one object relentlessly, but it has a strange effect. All other senses vanish. That was why I was particularly startled when the Duchess rushed into the room, blurring the gulf for me between her portrait and myself.

“There’s something moving behind the tree across the road from the gate!” she roared, pushing me aside, and fumbling with her key in the gold lock.

She was shaking with madness and excitement, and the key did not seem to want to go in. I reached out to help her, but the Duchess was already kneeling, her eye to the keyhole, to be certain that the key went through.

It was precisely that second that the arrow arrived, but this one never made it as far as the portrait.

I actually met Missun Akin years later, while I was in Morrowind to entertain some nobles. He was impressed that I had risen from being a humble domestic servant to being a bard of some renown. He himself had returned to the ashlands, and, like his old master Hiomaste, was retired to the simple life of teaching and hunting.

I told him that I had heard that Lady Villea decided not to leave the city, and that the village of Moliva had been rebuilt. He was happy to hear that, but I could not find a way to ask him what I really wanted to know. I felt like a fool just wondering if what I thought were true, that he had been behind Prolyssa’s tree across the road from the gate every morning that summer, firing an arrow through the gate, across the lawn, across the moat, through a keyhole, and into a portrait of the Duchess of Woda until it struck the Duchess herself. It was clearly an impossibility. I chose not to ask.

As we left one another that day, and he was waving good-bye, he said, “I am pleased to see you doing so well, my friend. I am happy you moved that chair.”

Chapter End Notes

I love the ending. It's so ominous and it makes this a favourite of mine.
The Black Arts on Trial

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

The Black Arts on Trial

by Hannibal Traven, Archmagister of the Mages Guild

History

Necromancy, often called the Black Arts, has a history that dates back before recorded time. Virtually all the earliest laws of the land mention it as expressly forbidden on pain of death. Independent practitioners of the arts of sorcery, however, continued its study.

The Psijic Order of the Isle of Artaeum, precursor to our own Mages Guild, also forbade its use, not only because it was dangerous, but their belief in the holy and unholy ancestor spirits made it heretical. Again, despite this, we hear many stories of students and masters who ignore this stricture. When Vanus Galerion left Artaeum, he may have disagreed with the Psijics on much, but he also refused to allow Necromancy to be taught in the Guild.

Almost 1100 years have passed since the time of Vanus Galerion, and there have been many archmagisters to lead his guild. The question of Necromancy has continued to be asked. The strictures against it in the Guild have never been lifted, but attitudes about it have shifted back and forth over the years. Some archmagisters have been inclined to ignore it entirely, some have fought very actively against it, and still other archmagisters have been rumoured to be Necromancers themselves.

In my new role as Archmagister of the Mages Guild, it is my duty to set policy on this matter. Though I have my own opinions on the Black Arts, I took counsel with two of the most learned mages in the Empire, Magister Voth Karlyss of Corinth and Magister Ulliceta gra-Kogg of Orsinium, and we debated for two days.

What follows are summaries of the salient points of the debate, arguments and counter-arguments, which led to the resolution of the Mages Guild on the subject of Necromancy.

Argument

Argument by Master gra-Kogg: Necromancy is poorly understood. We will not make it disappear by ignoring it. As an intellectual institution dedicated to the study of the magickal arts and sciences, we have obligations to the truth. Censoring ourselves in our scholarship is antithetical to our mission of neutrality and objectification.

Counter-Argument by Master Karlyss: The Mages Guild must balance its quest for knowledge with responsible caution and ethical standards. It is not ‘censoring’ a student’s course of study to have him proceed cautiously and with purity of purpose. It is not limiting a student’s freedom to set rules and boundaries—indeed, it is essential.
Argument by Master Karlyss: Necromancy is an anathema throughout the civilised world. To embrace it publicly, the Mages Guild would inspire fear and hostility in the populace at large. Vanus Galerion wanted this institution to be unlike the Psijic Order, which was elitist and separatist. We ignore public opinion at our own risk. We will certainly lose our charters in many places including, very likely, the whole of Morrowind, where sentiment of Necromancy is very strong.

Counter-Argument by Master gra-Kogg: Yes, we should be sensitive to the concerns of the community, but they should not and must not dictate our scholarship. ‘Necromancer’ to many uneducated persons simply means an evil mage. It is madness to limit our work because of prejudices and half-formed understanding. It is an affront to the purpose of objective study to turn our back on a subject merely because of public opinion.

Argument by Master gra-Kogg: Necromancers are the scourge of Tamriel. Whether operating independently or in concert with the sloads or King of Worms, Mannimarco, they are responsible for many horrors, animated zombies and skeletons and other forms of the undead. To best combat this menace, we must understand the powers of the Necromancer, and we cannot do that by restricting our study on the Black Arts.

Counter-Argument by Master Karlyss: No one is disputing the threat of the Black Arts—in fact, that is the very essence of my argument against the Mages Guild making it a school to be taught to our initiates. We can and should know what our enemy is capable of, but we must be careful not to step into a trap of looking too deep into his ways, and making those ways on their own. We do no one good if by studying the evil ways, we become evil ourselves.

Argument by Master Karlyss: Necromancy is inherently dangerous. One cannot ‘dabble’ in it. The simplest spell requires the spilling of blood, and immediately begins to corrupt the caster’s soul. This is not conjecture, but simple fact. It is irresponsible of the Guild to teach and thereby encourage a sort of magickal study which has proven itself, time and time again, to bring nothing but terror and misery on the practitioner and world.

Counter-Argument by Master gra-Kogg: All schools of magicka are dangerous to the uninitiated. A simple fireball spell from the School of Destruction can cause great harm when cast by a novice, not only to others but to the mage himself. The School of Mysticism by its very nature forces the practitioner to divorce his mind from logic, to embrace a temporary sort of insanity, which one might argue is very like corrupting one’s soul.

Argument by Master gra-Kogg: The Guild already permits some forms of Necromancy. The ‘Schools’ of magicka are, as we know, artificial constructs, originally formulated by Vanus Galerion to divide and thereby simplify study. They have changed many times throughout the years, but at their heart, every Master knows, they are all linked together. When a student of Conjuration summons a guardian ghost, he is touching on the School of Necromancy. When a Student of Enchantment uses a trapped soul, he too may be considered guilty of a Black Art. The School of Mysticism, as I have stated before, has some kinship with Necromancy as well. To state that students may not learn the ways of Necromancy is to stifle common skills in the other, more historically legitimate Schools of the Guild.

Counter-Argument by Master Karlyss: Yes, the Schools are intertwined, but the standard spells of each School have passed the proof of time. We know that a student of Mysticism, properly instructed, will not be permanently harmed by his experience. In many ways, it is a question of extremes—how far we would permit our studies to take us. Necromancy by its nature relies on the practitioner going further into the darkness than is wise, virtually guaranteeing his destruction. It has no place in the Mages Guild.
Conclusion

The risks of studying Necromancy outweigh its usefulness. The Guild does not wish to censor the study of any of its students, but it will not tolerate studies in the Black Arts, except in limited form for the purpose of combating its evil adherents. This may only be done by rare individuals who have proven themselves both highly skilled and highly cautious, and then only with my express permission and supervision.

Afterword

I regret to acknowledge the truth behind the rumour that Master Ulliceta gra-Kogg was more than an apologist for Necromancy, she was a Necromancer herself. Upon this revelation, the Knights of the Lamp attempted to arrest her at the Guildhouse in Orsinium, but she made good her escape. We have every confidence in the replacement Magister in Orsinium.

Though I disagreed, I respected her logical reasoning enough to include her arguments in this book, and I see no reason to remove them. It is disappointing, however, to see that her interest in ‘the truth’ was nothing more than a euphemism for her slavery to the Black Arts.

This unfortunate situation merely illustrates how essential it is for Guildmembers to be wary of the lure of Necromancy, and be vigilant to its practitioners’ infiltration in our Mages Guild.
Look upon the face of Boethiah and wonder. Raise your arms that Boethiah may look on them and bestow a blessing. Know that battle is a blessing. Know that death is an eventuality. Know that you are dust in the eyes of Boethiah.

Long is the arm of Boethiah, and swift is the blade.

Deep is the cut, and subtle is the poison.

Worship, o faithful. Pray your death is short.

Worship, o faithful. Pray your death is quiet.

Worship, o faithful. Worship the glory that is Boethiah.

Into battle strides the Daedric Prince, blade at the ready to cleave the unworthy.
Boethiah's Proving

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for death, betrayal, and blood mention.

Boethiah’s Proving

by Anonymous

~ The following account is true. May it serve as a warning to those with ears to hear and hearts to know. ~

On a certain day, at a certain time, the faithful gathered to perform certain rituals, hoping to gain a glimpse of their master. The day was correct, the summoning true.

Slashing a smoking tear through the veil, She, her-very-self, appeared before them, terrible and resplendent. She came arrayed in ebony darker than a moonless night, wielding a blade burning hotter than the surface of the sun. And though she wore the guise of a Dunmer warrior-queen, she towered above them like a statue carved from the Red Mountain itself.

“Why have you disturbed me?”
Surprised, the first among them prayed:

“O Boethiah, Prince of Plots, Deceiver of Nations, Queen of Shadows, Goddess of Destruction, we come to worship thee!”
She looked down upon her followers, gathered to bear witness. Frowning she asked the first:

“Tell me, you who profess to know me, how shall I know you?”
Afraid he claimed:

“Each night I pray to thee, each night I call out thy wondrous names. Surely thou must recognise the sound of my voice? Thy most devoted of believers?”
She frowned and let out a long sigh, and then of a sudden he was gone, the air from her long dispersing him.

Turning to the second she asked:

“And you? How shall I measure the worth of your existence?”
Stunned by the power of her voice, he bowed before her darkening visage.
She clapped her hands, and he too was gone.
To the third:

“And you, tell me, how shall I know you apart from such as were they, of whom there is no trace?”
Shaken and speechless from the nullifications of his brethren, he whispered:

“Have mercy upon us!”
She blinked twice. Once, he was in agony. Twice, he was destroyed.
She cast a withering glance across those remaining and said:
“I do not grant mercy.”
And so it was with the others. She putting them to proof, they offered none.
Finally she came to me, eyes aglow with anger, tongue wet with hate, and said:

“Of all my believers, but two remain. Tell me, second-to-last, with what shall you prove your existence?”
Without hesitation I drew forth my blade and buried it in the chest of the other who stood beside me, and without fear replied:

“Ask him whose blood now sprouts from my blade if I exist.”
She smiled. And the gates of Oblivion opened between her teeth. Then she said:

“Tell me, now-last of my followers, wherefore do you remain where the others do not?”
I retrieved my blade and offered it up saying:

“I am alive because that one is dead. I exist because I have the will to do so. And I shall remain as long as there are signs of my handwork, such as the blood dripping from this blade.”
Accepting my gift, she nodded and said:

“Indeed.”

~ If in reading, your blood boils in your veins, and your mind blazon with fire, then Boethiah calls you. It is then most wise to heed her calls. Find her on the mount which overlooks Windhelm. Meet us there and be tested. ~
The Requisite Book of Daedra

by Anonymous

[This volume is an encyclopaedic reference to the Lords of the Daedric Realms, their chief clans, the themes and spheres of influence of each clan, and to the legends and lore associated with those mortals who traffick with Daedra.]

Azura, whose sphere is dusk and dawn, the magic in-between realms of twilight, known as Moonshadow, Mother of the Rose, and Queen of the Night Sky.

Boethiah, whose sphere is deceit and conspiracy, and the secret plots of murder, assassination, treason, and unlawful overthrow of authority.

Clavicus Vile, whose sphere is the granting of power and wishes through ritual invocations and pact.

Hermaeus Mora, whose sphere is scrying the tides of Fate, of the past and future as read in the stars and heavens, and in whose dominion are the treasures of knowledge and memory.

Hircine, whose sphere is the Hunt, the Sport of Daedra, the Great Game, the Chase, known as the Huntsman and the Father of Manbeasts.

Malacath, whose sphere is the patronage of the spurned and ostracised, the keeper of the Sworn Oath, and the Bloody Curse.

Mehrunes Dagon, whose sphere is Destruction, Change, Revolution, Energy, and Ambition.

Mephala, whose sphere is obscured to mortals; known by the names Webspinner, Spinner, and Spider; whose only consistent theme seems to be interference in the affairs of mortals for her amusement.

Meridia, whose sphere is obscured to mortals; who is associated with the energies of living things.

Molag Bal, whose sphere is the domination and enslavement of mortals; whose desire is to harvest the souls of mortals and to bring mortal souls within his sway by spreading seeds of strife and discord in the mortal world.

Namira, whose sphere is the ancient Darkness; known as the Spirit Daedra, ruler of sundry dark and shadowy spirits; associated with spiders, insects, slugs, and other repulsive creatures which inspire mortals with an instinctive revulsion.

Nocturnal, whose sphere is the night and darkness; who is known as the Night Mistress.
Peryite, whose sphere is the ordering of the lowest orders of Oblivion, known as the Taskmaster.

Sanguine, whose sphere is hedonistic revelry and debauchery, and passionate indulgences of darker natures.

Sheogorath, whose sphere is Madness, and whose motives are unknowable.

Vaermina, whose sphere is the realm of dreams and nightmares, and from whose realm issues forth evil omens.

[Especially marked for special interest under the heading “Malacath” you find a reference to Scourge, blessed by Malacath, and dedicated to the use of mortals. In short, the reference suggests that any Daedra attempting to invoke the weapon’s powers will be expelled into the voidstreams of Oblivion.]

“Of the legendary artefacts of the Daedra, many are well known, like Azura’s Star and Sheogorath’s Wabbajack. Others are less well known, like Scourge, Mackkan’s Hammer, Bane of Daedra…”

“Yet though Malacath blessed Scourge to be potent against his Daedra kin, e thought not that it should fall into Daedric hands, then to serve as a tool for private war among caitiff and forsaken. Thus did Malacath curse the device such that, should any dark kin seek to invoke its powers, that a void should open and swallow that Daedra, and purge him into Oblivion’s voidstreams, from thence to pathfind back to the Real and Unreal Worlds in that full order of time.”
Thanks for reading and reviewing.
The Book of Life and Service

by Anonymous

The Ranks of the Blessed

Blessed are the Bonemen, for they serve without self in spirit forever.

Blessed are the Mistmen, for they blend in the glory of the translucent spirit.

Blessed are the Wrathmen, for they render their rage unto the ages.

Blessed are the Masters, for they bridge the past and span the future.

The Litany of Service

The Boneman’s Oath

We die.

We pray.

To live.

We serve.

The Master’s Voice

You swore.

To serve.

Your lord.
The Book of the Dragonborn

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

The Book of the Dragonborn

by Prior Emelene Madrine

Many people have heard the term “Dragonborn”—we are of course ruled by the “Dragonborn Emperors”—but the true meaning of the term is not commonly understood. For those of us in the Order of Talos, this is a subject near and dear to our hearts, and in this book I will attempt to illuminate the history and significance of those known as Dragonborn down through the ages.

Most scholars agree that the term was first used in connection with the Covenant of Akatosh, when the blessed St. Alessia was given the Amulet of Kings and the Dragonfires in the Temple of the One were first lit. “Akatosh, looking with pity upon the plight of men, drew precious blood from his own heart, and blessed St. Alessia with his blood of Dragons, and made a Covenant that so long as Alessia’s generations were true to the dragon blood, Akatosh would endeavour to seal tight the Gates of Oblivion, and to deny the armies of daedra and undead to their enemies, the Daedra-loving Ayleids.” Those blessed by Akatosh with “the dragon blood” became known more simply as Dragonborn.

The connection with the rulers of the Empire was thus there from the beginning—only those of the dragon blood were able to wear the Amulet of Kings and light the Dragonfires. All the legitimate rulers of the Empire have been Dragonborn—the Emperors and Empresses of the first Cyrodilic Empire founded by St. Alessia; Reman Cyrodiil and his heirs; and of course Tiber Septim and his heirs, down to our current Emperor, His Majesty Emperor Pelagius Septim IV.

Because of this connection with the Emperors, however, the other significance of the Dragonborn has been obscured and largely forgotten by all but scholars and those of us dedicated to the service of the blessed Talos, Who Was Tiber Septim. Very few realise that being Dragonborn is not a simple matter of heredity—being the blessing from Akatosh Himself, it is beyond our understanding exactly how and why it is bestowed. Those who become Emperor and light the Dragonfires are surely Dragonborn—the proof is in the wearing of the Amulet and the lighting of the Fires. But were they Dragonborn and thus able to do these things—or was the doing the sign of the blessing Akatosh descending upon them? All that we can say is that it is both, and neither—a divine mystery.

The line of Septims have all been Dragonborn, of course, which is one reason the simplistic notion of it being hereditary has become so commonplace. But we know for certain that the early Cyrodilic rulers were not all related. There is also no evidence that Reman Cyrodiil was descended from Alessia, although there are many legends that would make it so, most of them dating from the time of Reman and likely attempts to legitimise his rule. We know that the Blades, usually thought of as the Emperor’s bodyguards, originated in Akaviri crusaders who invaded Tamriel for obscure reasons in the late First Era. They appear to have been searching for a Dragonborn—the events at Pale Pass bear this out—and the Akaviri were the first to proclaim Reman Cyrodiil as Dragonborn.
In fact it was the Akaviri who did the most to promote his standing as Emperor (although Reman himself never took that title in his lifetime.) And of course there is no known hereditary connection between Tiber Septim and any of the previous Dragonborn rulers of Tamriel.

Whether there can be more than one Dragonborn at any time is another mystery. The Emperors have done their best to dismiss this notion, but of course the Imperial succession itself means that at the very least there are two or more potential Dragonborn at any time: the current ruler and his or her heirs. The history of the Blades also hints at this—although little is known of their activities during the Interregnum between Reman’s Empire and the rise of Tiber Septim, many believe that the Blades continued to search out and guard those they believed were (or might be) Dragonborn during this time.

Lastly, we come to the question of the true meaning of being Dragonborn. The connection with dragons is that in the early days being Dragonborn meant having “the dragon blood”. Some scholars believe that was meant quite literally, although the exact significance is not known. The Nords tell tales of Dragonborn heroes who were great dragonslayers, able to steal the power of the dragons they killed. Indeed, it was well known that the Akaviri sought out and killed many dragons during their invasion, and there is some evidence that this continued after they became Reman Cyrodiil’s Dragonguard (again, the connection to dragons)—the direct predecessors to the Blades of today.

I leave you with what is known as “The Prophecy of the Dragonborn”. It is often said to originate in an Elder Scroll, although it is sometimes attributed to the ancient Akaviri. Many have attempted to decipher it, and many have also believed that its omens had been fulfilled and that the advent of the “Last Dragonborn” was at hand. I make no claims as an interpreter of prophecy, but it does suggest that the true significance of Akatosh’s gift to mankind has yet to be fully understood.

When misrule takes its place at the eight corners of the world

When the Brass Tower walks and Time is reshaped

When the thrice-blessed fail and the Red Tower trembles

When the Dragonborn Ruler loses his throne, and the White Tower falls

When the White Tower lies sundered, kingless, bleeding

The World-Eater wakes, and the wheel turns upon the Last Dragonborn.
He walked through the dry, crowded streets of Bal Fell, glad to be among so many strangers. In the wharfs, he had no such anonymity. There, they knew him to be a smuggler, but here, he could be anyone. A lower-class peddler perhaps. A student even. Some people even pushed against him as he walked past as if to say, “We would not dream of being so rude as to acknowledge that you don’t belong here.”

Seryne Relas was not in any of the taverns, but he knew she was somewhere, perhaps behind a tenement window or poking around in a dunghill for an exotic ingredient for some spell or another. Of the ways of sorceresses, he knew only that they were always doing something eccentric. Because of this prejudice, he nearly passed by the old Dunmer woman having a drink from a well. It was too prosaic, but he knew from the look of her that she was Seryne Relas, the great sorceress.

“I have gold for you,” he said to her back. “If you will teach me the secret of breathing water.”

She turned around, a wide wet grin stretched across her weathered features. “I ain’t breathing it, boy. I’m just having a drink.”

“Don’t mock me,” he said, stiffly. “Either you’re Seryne Relas and you will teach me the spell of breathing water, or you aren’t. Those are the only possibilities.”

“If you’re going to breathe water, you’re going to have to learn there are more possibilities than that, boy. The School of Alteration is all about possibilities, changing patterns, making things be what they could be. Maybe I ain’t Seryne Relas, but I can teach you how to breathe water,” she wiped her mouth dry. “Or maybe I am Seryne Relas and I won’t. Or maybe I can teach you to breathe water, but you can’t learn.”

“I’ll learn,” he said, simply.

“Why don’t you just buy yourself a spell of water breathing or a potion over at the Mages Guild?” she asked. “That’s how it’s generally done.”

“They’re not powerful enough,” he said. “I need to be underwater for a long time. I’m willing to pay whatever you ask, but I don’t want any questions. I was told you could teach me.”

“What’s your name, boy?”

“That’s a question,” he replied. His name was Tharien Winloth, but in the wharfs, they called him the Tollman. His job, such as it was, was collecting a percentage of loot from the smugglers when they came into harbour to bring to his boss in the Camonna Tong. From that percentage, he earned a smaller percentage. In the end it was very small indeed. He had scarcely any gold of his own, and
what he had, he gave to Seryne Relas.

The lessons began that very day. The sorceress brought her pupil out to a low sandbank along the sea.

“I will teach you a powerful spell for breathing water, boy,” she said. “But you must become a master of it. As will all spells and all skills, the more you practice, the better you get. Even that ain’t enough. To achieve true mastery, you must understand what it is you are doing. It ain’t simple enough to perform a perfect thrust of a blade—you must also know what you are doing and why.”

“That’s common sense,” said Tharien.

“Yes, it is,” said Seryne, closing her eyes. “But the spells of Alteration are all about uncommon sense. The infinite possibilities, breaking the sky, swallowing space, dancing with time, setting ice on fire, believing the unreal may become real. You must learn the rules of the cosmos and break them.”

“That sounds… very difficult,” replied Tharien, trying to keep a straight face.

Seryne pointed to a small silver fish darting along the water’s edge. “They don’t find it so. They breathe water just fine.”

“But that’s not magic.”

“What I’m saying to you, boy, is that it is.”

For several weeks, Seryne drilled her student, and the more he understood about what he was doing and the more he practiced, the longer he could breathe underwater. When he found that he could cast the spell for as long as he needed, he thanked the sorceress and bade her farewell.

“There is one last lesson I have to teach you,” she said. “You must learn that desire is not enough. The world will end your spell no matter how good you are, and no matter how much you want it.”

“That’s a lesson I’m happy not to learn,” he said, and left at once for the short journey back to the wharfs of Tear.

The wharfs were much the same, with all the same smells, the same sounds, and the same characters. He found from his mates that the Boss found a new Tollman. They were still looking out for the smuggler ship Morodrung, but they had given up hope of ever seeing it. Tharien knew they would not. He saw it sink in the bay weeks ago. On a moonless night, he cast his spell and dove into the thrashing purple waves. He kept his mind on the world of possibilities, that books could sing, that green was blue, that that water was air, that every stroke and kick brought him closer to a sunken ship filled with treasure. He felt magicka surge all around him as he pushed his way deeper down. Ahead he saw a ghostly shadow of the Morodrung, its mast billowing in a wind of deep-water currents. He also felt his spell start to fade. He could break reality long enough to breathe water all the way back up to the surface, but not enough to reach the ship.

The next night, he dove again, and this time, the spell was stronger. He could see the vessel in detail, clouded over and dusted in sediment. He saw the wound in its hull where it struck the rocks. A glint of gold beckoned from within. Bit he felt reality closing in, and he had to surface.

The third night, he made it into the steerage, past the bloated corpses of the sailors, nibbled and picked apart by fish. Their glassy eyes bulging, their mouths stretched open. Had they only known the spell, he thought briefly, but his mind was more occupied by the gold scattered along the floor that spilled from broken chests and sacks. He considered scooping as much he could carry into his
pockets, but a sturdy iron box seemed to bespeak more treasures.

On the wall was a row of keys. He took each down and tried it on the locked box, but none opened it. One key, however, was missing. Tharien looked around the room. Where could it be? His eyes went to the corpse of one of the sailors, floating in a dance of death not far from the box, his hands tightly clutching something. It was a key. When the ship had begun to sink, this sailor had evidently gone for the iron box. Whatever was in it must have been very valuable.

Tharien took the sailor’s key and opened the box. It was filled with broken glass. He rummaged around until he felt something solid, and pulled out two flasks of some kind of wine. He smiled as he considered the foolishness of the poor alcoholic. This was what was important to the sailor, out of all the treasure in the Morodrung.

Then, suddenly, Tharien Winloth felt reality.

He had not been paying attention to the grim, tireless advance of the world on his spell. It was fading away, his ability to breathe water. There was no time to surface. There was no time to do anything. As he sucked in, his lungs filled with cold, briny water.

A few days later, the smugglers working on the wharf came upon the drowned body of the former Tollman. Finding a body in the water in Tear was not in itself noteworthy, but the subject that they discussed over many bottles of flin was how it could happen that he drowned with two potions of water breathing in his hands?
A Brief History of the Empire, Part One

by Stronach k’Thojj III, Imperial Historian

Before the rule of Tiber Septim, all Tamriel was in chaos. The poet Tracizis called the period of continuous unrest “days and nights of blood and venom”. The kings were a petty lot of grasping tyrants, who fought Tiber’s attempts to bring order to the land. But they were as disorganised as they were dissolute, and the strong hand of Septim brought peace forcibly to the Tamriel. The year was 2E 896. The following year, the Emperor declared the beginning of a new Era—thus began the Third Era, Year Aught.

For thirty-eight years, the Emperor Tiber reigned supreme. It was a lawful, pious, and glorious age, when justice was known to one and all, from serf to sovereign. On Tiber’s death, it rained for an entire fortnight as if the land of Tamriel itself was weeping.

The Emperor’s grandson, Pelagius, came to the throne. Though his reign was short, he was as strong and resolute as his father had been, and Tamriel could have enjoyed a continuation of the Golden Age. Alas, an unknown enemy of the Septim Family hired that accursed organisation of cutthroats, the Dark Brotherhood, to kill the Emperor Pelagius Septim as he knelt at prayer at the Temple of the One in the Imperial City. Pelagius Septim’s reign lasted less than three years.

Pelagius had no living children, so the Imperial Crown passed to his first cousin, the daughter of Tiber’s brother Agnorith. Kintyra, former Queen of Silvenar, assumed the throne as Kintyra I. Her reign was blessed with prosperity and good harvests, and she herself was an avid patroness of art, music, and dance.

Kintyra’s son was crowned after her death, the first Emperor of Tamriel to use the Imperial name Uriel. Uriel I was the great lawmaker of the Septim Dynasty, and a promoter of independent organisations and guilds. Under his kind but firm hand, the Fighters Guild and the Mages Guild increased in prominence throughout Tamriel. His son and successor Uriel II reigned for eighteen years, from the death of Uriel I in 3E64 to Pelagius Septim’s accession in 3E82. Tragically, the rule of Uriel II was cursed with blights, plagues, and insurrections. The tenderness he inherited from his father did not serve Tamriel well, and little justice was done.

Pelagius Septim inherited not only the throne from his father, but the debt from the latter’s poor financial and judicial management. Pelagius dismissed all of the Elder Council, and allowed only those willing to pay great sums to resume their seats. He encouraged similar acts among his vassals, the kings of Tamriel, and by the end of his seventeen year reign, Tamriel had returned to prosperity. His critics, however, have suggested that any advisor possessed of wisdom but not of gold had been summarily ousted by Pelagius. This may have led to some of the troubles his son Antiochus faced when he in turn became Emperor.

Antiochus was certainly one of the more flamboyant members of the usually austere Septim
Family. He had numerous mistresses and nearly as many wives, and was renowned for the grandeur of his dress and his high good humour. Unfortunately, his reign was rife with civil war, surpassing even that of his grandfather Uriel Septim II. The War of the Isle in 3E110, twelve years after Antiochus assumed the throne, nearly took the province of Summerset Isle away from Tamriel. The united alliance of the kings of Summerset and Antiochus only managed to defeat King Orghum of the island-kingdom of Pyandonea due to a freak storm. Legend credits the Psijic Order of the Isle of Artaeum with the sorcery behind the tempest.

The story of Kintyra II, heiress to her father Antiochus' throne, is certainly one of the saddest tales in Imperial history. Her first cousin Uriel, son of Queen Potema of Solitude, accused Kintyra of being a bastard, alluding to the infamous decadence of the Imperial City during her father’s reign. When this accusation failed to stop her coronation, Uriel bought the support of several disgruntled kings of High Rock, Skyrim, and Morrowind, and with Queen Potema’s assistance, he coordinated three attacks on the Septim Empire.

The first attack occurred in the Iliac Bay region, which separates High Rock and Hammerfell. Kintyra’s entourage was massacred and the Empress taken captive. For two years, Kintyra II languished in an Imperial prison believed to be somewhere in Glenpoint or Glenmoril before she was slain in her cell under mysterious circumstances. The second attack was on a series of Imperial garrisons along the coastal Morrowind islands. The Empress’ consort Kontin Arynx fell defending the forts. The third and final attack was a siege of the Imperial City itself, occurring after the Elder Council had split up the army to attack western High Rock and eastern Morrowind. The weekend government had little defence against Uriel’s determined aggression, and capitulated after only a fortnight of resistance. Uriel took the throne that same evening and proclaimed himself Uriel III, Emperor of Tamriel. The year was 3E 121. Thus began the war of the Red Diamond, described in Volume II of this series.
A Brief History of the Empire, Part Two

by Stronach k’Thojj III, Imperial Historian

Volume I of this series described in brief the lives of the first eight Emperors of the Septim Dynasty, beginning with the glorious Tiber Septim and ending with his great, great, great, great grandniece Kintyra II. Kintyra’s murder in Glenpoint while in captive is considered by some the end of the pure strain of Septim blood in the Imperial family. Certainly it marks the end of something significant.

Uriel III not only proclaimed himself Emperor of Tamriel, but also Uriel Septim III, taking the eminent surname as a title. In truth, his surname was Mantiarco from his father’s line. In time, Uriel III was disposed and his crimes reviled, but the tradition of taking the name Septim as a title for the Emperor of Tamriel did not die with him.

For six years, the War of the Red Diamond (which takes its name from the Septim Family’s famous badge) tore the Empire apart. The combatants were the three surviving children of Pelagius II—Potema, Cephorus, and Magnus—and their various offspring. With the efforts of Cephorus and Magnus, however, the province of High Rock turned coat. The provinces of Hammerfell, Summerset Isle, Valenwood, Elsweyr, and Black Marsh were divided in their loyalty, but most kings supported Cephorus and Magnus.

In 3E127, Uriel III was captured at the Battle of Ichidag in Hammerfell. En route to his trial in the Imperial City, a mob overtook his prisoner’s carriage and burned him alive within it. His captor and uncle continued on to the Imperial City, and by common acclaim was proclaimed Cephorus I, Emperor of Tamriel.

Cephorus’ reign was marked by nothing but war. By all accounts, he was a kind and intelligent man, but what Tamriel needed was a great warrior—and he, fortunately, was that. It took an additional ten years of constant warfare for him to defeat his sister Potema. The so-called Wolf Queen of Solitude who died in the siege of her city-state in the year 137. Cephorus survived his sister by only three years. He never had time during the war years to marry, so it was his brother, the fourth child of Pelagius II, who assumed the throne.

The Emperor Magnus was already elderly when he took up the Imperial diadem, and the business of punishing the traitorous kings of the War of the Red Diamond drained much of his remaining strength. Legend accuses Magnus’ son and heir Pelagius Septim III of patricide, but that seems highly unlikely—for no other reason than that Pelagius was King of Solitude following the death of Potema, and seldom visited the Imperial City.

Pelagius Septim III, sometimes called Pelagius the Mad, was proclaimed Emperor in the 145th year of the Third Era. Almost from the start, his eccentricities of behaviour were noted at court. He
embarrassed dignitaries, offended his vassal kings, and on one occasion marked the end of an Imperial grand ball by attempting to hang himself. His long-suffering wife was finally awarded the Regency of Tamriel, and Pelagius Septim III was sent to a series of healing institutions and asylums until his death in 3E153 at the age of thirty-four.

The Empress Regent of Tamriel was proclaimed Empress Katariah I upon the death of her husband. Some who do not mark the end of the Septim bloodline with the death of Kintyra II consider the ascendancy of this Dark Elf woman the true mark of its decline. Her defenders, on the other hand, assert that though Katariah was not descended from Tiber, the son she had with Pelagius was, so the Imperial chain did continue. Despite racist assertions to the contrary, Katariah’s forty-six year reign was one of the most celebrated in Tamriel’s history. Uncomfortable in the Imperial City, Katariah travelled extensively throughout the Empire such as no Emperor ever had since Tiber’s day. She repaired much of the damage that previous emperors broken alliances and bungled diplomacy created. The people of Tamriel came to love their Empress far more than the nobility did. Katariah’s death in a minor skirmish in Black Marsh is a favourite subject of conspiracy minded historians. The Sage Montialius’ discovery, for instance, of a disenfranchised branch of the Septim Family and their involvement with the skirmish was a revelation indeed.

When Cassynder assumed the throne upon the death of his mother, he was already middle-aged. Only half Elven, he aged like a Breton. In fact, he had left the rule of Wayrest to his half-brother Uriel due to poor health. Nevertheless, as the only true blood relation of Pelagius and thus Tiber, he was pressed into accepting the throne. To no one’s surprise, the Emperor Cassynder’s reign did not last long. In two years he had joined his predecessors in eternal slumber.

Uriel Lariat, Cassynder’s half-brother, and the child of Katariah I and her Imperial consort Gallivere Lariat (after the death of Pelagius III), left the kingdom of Wayrest to reign as Uriel IV. Legally, Uriel IV was a Septim: Cassynder had adopted him into the royal family when he had become King of Wayrest. Nevertheless, to the Council and the people of Tamriel, he was a bastard child of Katariah. Uriel did not possess the dynamism of his mother, and his long forty-three-year reign was a hotbed of sedition.

Uriel IV’s story is told in the third volume of this series.
The first volume of this series told in brief the story of succession of the first eight Emperors of the Septim Dynasty, from Tiber Septim I to Kintyra II. The second volume described the War of the Red Diamond and the six Emperors that followed its aftermath, from Uriel III to Cassynder. At the end of that volume, it was described how the Emperor Cassynder’s half brother Uriel IV assumed the throne of the Empire of Tamriel.

It will be recalled that Uriel IV was not a Septim by birth. His mother, though she reigned as Empress for many years, was a Dark Elf married to a true Septim Emperor, Pelagius Septim III. Uriel’s father was actually Katariah’s consort after Pelagius’ death, a Breton nobleman named Gallivere Lariat. Before taking the throne of Empire, Cassynder had ruled the kingdom of Wayrest, but poor health had forced him to retire. Cassynder had no children, so he legally adopted his half brother Uriel and abdicated the kingdom. Seven years later, Cassynder inherited the Empire at the death of his mother. Three years after that, Uriel once again found himself the recipient of Cassynder’s inheritance.

Uriel IV’s reign was a long and difficult one. Despite being a legally adopted member of the Septim Family, and despite the Lariat Family’s high position indeed, they were distant cousins of the Septims few of the Elder Council could be persuaded to accept him fully as a blood descendant of Tiber. The Council had assumed much responsibility during Katariah’s long reign and Cassynder’s short one, and a strong willed “alien” monarch like Uriel IV found it impossible to command their unswerving fealty. Time and again the Council and Emperor were at odds, and time and again the Council won the battles. Since the days of Pelagius Septim II, the Elder Council had consisted of the wealthiest men and women in the Empire, and the power they wielded was conclusive.

The Council’s last victory over Uriel IV was posthumous. Andorak Septim, Uriel IV’s son, was disinherited by vote of Council, and a cousin more closely related to the original Septim line was proclaimed Cephorus II in 3E247. For the first nine years of Cephorus II’s reign, those loyal to Andorak Septim battled the Imperial forces. In an act that the Sage Eraintine called “Tiber Septim’s heart beating no more,” the Council granted Andorak Septim the High Rock kingdom of Shornhelm to end the war, and Andorak Septim’s descendants still rule there.

By and large, Cephorus II had foes that demanded more of his attention than Andorak. “From out of a cimmerian nightmare,” in the words of Eraintine, a man who called himself the Camoran Usurper led an army of Daedra and undead warriors on a rampage through Valenwood, conquering kingdom after kingdom. Few could resist his onslaughts, and as month turned to bloody month in the year 3E249, even fewer tried. Cephorus II sent more and more mercenaries into Hammerfell to stop the Usurper’s northward march, but they were bribed or slaughtered and raised as undead.
The story of the Camoran Usurper deserves a book of its own. (It is recommended that the reader find Palaux Illthre’s The Fall of the Usurper for more details.) In short, however, the destruction of the forces of the Usurper had little to do with the efforts of the Emperor. The result was a great regional victory and an increase in hostility toward the seemingly inefficacious Empire.

Uriel V, Cephorus II’s son and successor, swivelled opinion back toward the latent power of the Empire. Turning the attention of Tamriel away from internal strife, Uriel V embarked on a series of invasions beginning almost from the moment he took the throne in 3E 268. Uriel V conquered Roscrea in 271, Cathnoquey in 276, Yneslea in 279, and Esroniet in 284. In 3E 288, he embarked on his most ambition enterprise, the invasion of the continent kingdom of Akavir. This ultimately proved a failure, for two years later Uriel V was killed in Akavir on the battlefield of Ionith. Nevertheless, Uriel V holds up a reputation second only to Tiber as one of the two great Warrior Emperors of Tamriel.

The last four Emperors, beginning with Uriel V’s infant son, are described in the fourth and final volume of this series.
Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for death and war.

A Brief History of the Empire, Part Four

by Stronach k’Thojj, Imperial Historian

The first of this series described, in brief, the first eight Emperors of the Septim Dynasty beginning with Tiber I. The second volume described the War of the Red Diamond and the six Emperors who followed. The third volume described the troubles of the next three Emperors—the frustrated Uriel IV, the ineffectual Cephorus II, and the heroic Uriel V.

On Uriel V’s death across the sea in distant, hostile Akavir, Uriel VI was but five years old. In fact, Uriel VI was born only shorter before his father left for Akavir. Uriel V’s other progeny, by a morganatic alliance, were the twins Morihatha and Eloisa, who had been born a month after Uriel V left. Uriel VI was crowned in the 290th year of the Third Era. The Imperial Consort Thonica, as the boy’s mother, was given a restricted Regency until Uriel VI reached his majority. The Elder Council retained the real power, as they had ever since the days of Katariah.

The Council so enjoyed its unlimited and unrestricted freedom to promulgate laws (and generate profits) that Uriel VI was not given full license to rule until 307, when he was already 22 years old. He had been slowly assuming positions of responsibility for years, but both the Council and his mother, who enjoyed even her limited Regency, were loathed to hand over the reigns. By the time he came to the throne, the mechanisms of government gave him little power except for except for that of the Imperial veto.

This power, however, he regularly and vigorously exercised. By 313, Uriel VI could boast with confidence that he truly did rule Tamriel. He utilised defunct spy networks and guard units to bully and coerce the difficult members of the Elder Council. His half-sister Morihatha Septim was (not surprisingly) his staunchest ally, especially after her marriage to Baron Ulfe Gersen of Winterhold brought her considerable wealth and influence. As the Sage Ugaridge said, “Uriel V conquered Esroniet, but Uriel VI conquered the Elder Council.”

When Uriel VI fell off a horse and could not be resuscitated by the finest Imperial healers, his beloved sister Morihatha took up the Imperial tiara. At 25 years of age, she had been described by (admittedly self-serving) diplomats as the most beautiful creature in all of Tamriel. She was certainly well-learned, vivacious, athletic, and a well-practiced politician. She brought the Archmagister of Skyrim to the Imperial City and created the second Imperial Battlemage since the days of Tiber Septim.

Morihatha finished the job her brother had begun, and made the Cyrodiil a true government under the Empress (and later, the Emperor). Outside the Cyrodiil, however, the Empire had been slowly disintegrating. Open revolutions and civil wars had raged unchallenged since the days of her grandfather Cephorus II. Carefully coordinating her counterattacks, Morihatha Septim slowly claimed back her rebellious vassals, always avoiding overextending herself.
Though Morihatha’s military campaigns were remarkably successful, her deliberate pace often frustrated the Council. One Councilman, an Argonian who took the Colovian name of Thoricles Romus, furious at her refusal to send troops to his troubled Black Marsh, is commonly believed to have hired the assassins who claimed her life in 3E 339. Romus was summarily tried and executed, though he protested his innocence to the last.

Morihatha had no surviving children, and Eloisa had died of a fever four years before. Eloisa’s 25-year-old son Pelagius was thus crowned Pelagius Septim IV. Pelagius Septim IV continued his aunt’s work, slowly bringing under his wing the radical and refractory kingdoms, duchies, and baronies of the Empire. He exercised Morihatha’s poise and circumspect pace in his endeavours—but alas, he did not attain her success. The kingdoms had been free of restraint for so long that even a benign Imperial presence was considered odious. Nevertheless, when Pelagius died after a notably stable and prosperous twenty-nine-year reign, Tamriel was closer to unity than it had been since the days of Uriel I.

Our current Emperor, His Awesome and Terrible Majesty, Uriel Septim VII, son of Pelagius, has the diligence of his great-aunt Morihatha, the political skill of his great-uncle Uriel VI, and the military prowess of his great grand-uncle Uriel V. For twenty-one years he reigned and brought justice and order to Tamriel. In the year 3E389, however, his Imperial Battlemage, Jagar Tharn, betrayed him.

Uriel VII was imprisoned in a dimension of Tharn’s creation, and Tharn used his sorcery of illusion to assume the Emperor’s aspect. For the next ten years, Tharn abused Imperial privilege but did not continue Uriel VII’s schedule of reconquest. It is not yet entirely known what Tharn’s goals and personal accomplishments were during the ten years he masqueraded as his liege lord. In 3E399, an enigmatic Champion defeated the Battlemage in the dungeons of the Imperial Palace and freed Uriel VII from his other-dimensional jail.

Since his emancipation, Uriel VII has worked diligently to renew the battles that would reunite Tamriel. Tharn’s interference broke the momentum, it is true—but the years since then have proven that there is hope of the Golden Age of Tiber Septim’s rule glorifying Tamriel once again.
The Brothers of Darkness

by Pellarne Assi

As their name suggests, the Dark Brotherhood has a history shrouded in obfuscation. Their ways are secret to those who are not themselves Brothers of the Order (“Brother” is a generic term; some of their deadliest assassins are female, but they are often called Brothers as well). How they continue to exist in shadow, but be easily found by those desperate enough to pay for their services, is not the least of the mysteries surrounding them.

The Dark Brotherhood sprang from a religious order, the Morag Tong, during the Second Era. The Morag Tong were worshippers of the Daedra spirit Mephala, who encouraged them to commit ritual murders. In their early years, they were as disorganised as only obscure cultists could be due to there being no one to lead the group, and as a group they dared not murder anybody of any importance. This changed with the rise of the Night Mother.

All leaders of the Morag Tong, and then afterward the Dark Brotherhood, have been called the Night Mother. Whether the same woman (if it is even a woman) has commanded the Dark Brotherhood since the Second Era is unknown. What is believed is that the original Night Mother developed an important doctrine of the Morag Tong, the belief that, while Mephala does grow stronger with every murder committed in her name, certain murders were better than others. Murders that came from hate pleased Mephala more than murders committed because of greed. Murders of great men and women pleased Mephala more than murders of the relative unknowns.

We can approximate the time this belief was adopted with the first known murder committed by the Morag Tong. In the year 324 of the Second Era, the Potentate Versidue-Shaie was murdered in his palace in what is today the Elsweyr kingdom of Senchal. In a brash move, the Night Mother announced the identity of the murderers by painting “MORAG TONG” on the walls in the Potentate’s own blood.

Previous to that, the Morag Tong existed in relative peace, more or less like a witches’ coven—occasionally persecuted but usually ignored. In remarkable synchronicity at a time when Tamriel the Arena was a fractured land, the Morag Tong was outlawed throughout the continent. Every sovereign gave the cult’s elimination his highest priority. Nothing more was officially heard of them for a hundred years.

It is more difficult to date the Era when the Morag Tong re-emerged as the Dark Brotherhood, especially as other guilds of assassins have sporadically appeared throughout the history of Tamriel. The first mention of the Dark Brotherhood that I have found is from the journals of the Blood Queen Arlimahera of Hegathe. She spoke of slaying her enemies by her own hand, or if necessary “with the help of the Night Mother and her Dark Brotherhood, the secret arsenal my family has employed since my grandfather’s time.” Arlimahera wrote this in 2E412, so we can surmise that the Dark Brotherhood had been in existence since at least 360 if her grandfather had
truly made use of them.

The important distinction between the Dark Brotherhood and the Morag Tong was that the Brotherhood was a business as much as it was a cult. Rulers and wealthy merchants used the order as an assassin’s guild. The Brotherhood gained the obvious rewards of a profitable enterprise, as well as the secondary benefit that rulers could no longer actively persecute them: They were needed. They were purveyors of an essential commodity. Even an extremely virtuous leader would be unwise to mistreat the Brotherhood.

Not long after Arlimahera’s journal entries came perhaps the most famous series of executions in the history of the Dark Brotherhood, the Colovian Emperor-Potentate Savirien-Chorak and every one of his heirs were murdered on one bloody night in Sun’s Dawn in 430. Within a fortnight, the Colovian Dynasty crumbled, to the delight of its enemies. For over four hundred years, until the advent of the Warrior Emperor Tiber Septim, chaos reigned over Tamriel. Though no comparably impressive executions have been recorded, the Brotherhood must have grown fat with gold during that interregnum.

The Dark Brotherhood has no shortage of business opportunities—an “accounting”, I have been informed, is the Brotherhood’s favourite euphemism for an execution. While they are officially an unlawful organisation in every corner of the Empire, like the Thieves Guild, they are almost universally tolerated.
Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for death and stalking.

Butcher Journal #1

The plans are coming together swimmingly. I’ve found good sources of bone, flesh, and blood, but thus far a good sampling of sinew and marrow have escaped me. No matter. The city is swollen with contemptuous fools who will be missed by nobody.

Last night was almost able to corner Susanna as she left Candlehearth. Idiot guard showed up at just the wrong moment and I had to turn about, just out for a stroll, and so forth. There will be other chances, but the time is drawing near.

I think back to my time in Winterhold. All the wasted minds up in their towers. They only explore the magic they already know. I am discovering new magic here. Something deeper than the cantripped shenanigans of fire and night. This flesh magic is older than us. Perhaps older than the world itself. I am tugging at the corners of the fabrics of the universe, and where it bunches and folds is where I shall create my greatest triumph.

One more attempt at the Candlehearth girl. She’s proving to be a bit too cautious, but those strong joints of hers should contain the most exquisite tendons. Worth the effort. Tonight.
Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for implied necromancy.

17 tendons and assorted ligaments
173 fragments of bone for assemblage
approx. t bucket-fulls of blood (Nord preferred)
6 spoons of marrow (no more than 2 from the thigh
12 yards of flesh (before cutting)

star-scrying to the edge of the ice-mind
look to the lights where the souls dance
revealing the time when a spark will revive
when the rotted unite under most skillful hands

(translated from Aldmer text, as interpreted by the Ayleids and first transcribed by Altmer. provenance and authority unknown)

soon
Soon enough, my sweet Lucilla, you will be with me again. Normally when such words are written it is because the love left behind is soon to depart, but in my case, I hope to soon bring your spirit back into my world, for it was you who loved this world too much, not I.

I continue to collect your new form from the ragged bits around Windhelm. If they only knew what destiny would soon grace their bodies, with your spirit imbuing them with higher purpose, they would surely thank me for the great gift I give them. I reserve for them a place of beauty alongside your heart.

The day draws near. Soon I will hold you. And I will show you this and it will be as delivering a long-forgotten letter to a weary traveller.

Love always,

Calixto
Thanks for reading and reviewing.

The Buying Game

by Ababael Timar-Dadisun

So many people simply buy the items they need at the price they are given. It’s a very sad state of affairs, when the game is really open to all, you don’t need an invitation. And it is a game, the game of bargaining, to be played seriously and, I hasten to add, politely. In Elsweyer, it is common for the shop-owner to offer the prospective buyer tea or sweetmeats and engage in polite conversation before commencing the business. This eminently civilised tradition has a practical purpose, allowing the buyer to observe the wares for sale. It is considered impolite not to accept, though it does not imply obligation on the part of the buyer.

Whether this particular custom is part of the culture or not, it’s wise for the buyer and seller to greet one another with smiles and warm salutations, like gladiators honouring one another before the battle.

Bargaining is expected all over Tamriel, but the game can be broken if one’s offer is so preposterously low that it insults the shop-keeper. If you are offering something for ten gold pieces, try offering six and see where that takes you.

Do not look like you’re very interested, but do not mock the quality of the goods, even if they deserve it. Much better to admire the quality of workmanship, but comment that, regularly, you simply cannot afford such a price. When the shop-keeper compliments your taste, smile, but try to resist the flattery.

A lot of the game depends on recognising the types of shop-keepers and not automatically assuming that the rural merchant is ignorant and easily fooled, or the rapacious city merchant is selling shoddy merchandise. Caravans, it should be mentioned, are always good places to go to buy or trade.

Knowing what you’re buying and from whom is a talent bought only after years of practice. Know the specialties of certain regions and merchants before you even step foot in a shop. Recognise too the prejudices of the region. In Morrowind where I hail from, for example, Argonians are viewed with a certain amount of suspicion. Don’t be surprised or insulted if the shopkeepers follow you around the shop, assuming you’re going to steal something. Similarly, Nords, Bretons, and Cyrodiils are sometimes treated coolly by merchants in the Summerset Isles. Of course, I don’t know any shopkeepers anywhere, no matter their open-mindedness, who aren’t alert when a Khajiit or a Bosmer enters their shop. Even Khajiiti and Bosmeri merchants.

If you see something you really like or need, buy it then and there at the best price you can get. I cannot tell you how many times I passed up a rare and interesting relic, assuming that I could find it somewhere else in the region, perhaps at a larger town at a better price. Too later, I discovered I was wrong, and when I returned to the shop weeks later, the item I wanted was gone. Better to get a
great purchase at a decent price and discover it again at a worse price than to miss out on your opportunities for ownership. Occasionally impulsiveness is the best buying strategy.

Sense the moves of the game, and everyone can win.
Late one night, a few seasons ago, a soldier was returning home after several bloody battles. He decided he would save some gold and decided to cross the pine forest on foot.

The first day of his journey was rather uneventful, the soldier stuck to the main path and kept a brisk pace. When it started getting dark he set up his bed roll, built a small fire, and cooked up some rabbit he caught. “A fine day indeed,” he thought to himself as he fell asleep.

Partway through the evening, the soldier was woken up by soft sobbing in the distance. He grabbed his sword, assuming it to be a bandit trick, but pretended to sleep so he could get the jump on them. After a few minutes, the sobbing started moving away from the camp until he could no longer hear it. For the rest of the night, he slept with one eye open.

Day two, the soldier awoken with what rotten sleep he could catch and started off through the forest at a quicker pace, intending to put some distance between himself and whatever he had heard last night. As the day went on, it began to rain heavy, so the soldier built himself a shelter for the evening, so he could remain dry as he slept.

It took him a little longer to fall asleep with thoughts of the previous night in mind, but eventually slept.

This time he awoke to sobbing that sounded like it was right outside his shelter. The soldier grabbed his sword, and crawled out of the shelter. In front of the fire, he saw the back of a ghostly woman sobbing into her hands.

The soldier mustered his courage, and asked her what was wrong.

No answer.

He began to slowly approach, but before he could reach her, she turned and screamed at him. The ghostly woman raised an axe and ran at the soldier, disappearing before she made contact. The soldier took off into the night with just his sword in his hand. He ran until the first light of dawn where he started down the road again, as fast as he could move.

The third day was bright and sunny, but the soldier, rattled and sleepless, didn’t even notice. He moved as fast as he could, trying to get through the forest before night fall. As darkness began to fall, he saw a cabin just off the road and thought to himself it would be a good place to bunker
down for the night. After arriving at the cabin, he spent some time blocking the doors and the windows, nothing would get in. Despite his preparations, he could not sleep. He sat in what used to be the cabin’s bedroom staring at the barricaded door shaking. Eventually he could keep his eyes open no longer, and fell asleep.

This time he awoke to laughing on the other side of the barricaded door. It sounded like the woman before, but he refused to believe it was her. The soldier burst through the door to find the ghostly woman from the night before, staring at the ground, laughing hysterically, with axe in hand.

He began to recklessly attack the ghostly woman but he felt his strikes were less effective. He used a scroll of Fireball which drew a scream from her and she exploded, disappearing. The ordeal was over, the ghost was gone.

The soldier slept well that night, and the next day made excellent distance through the woods. As the sun began to set he came out the other side of the forest and looked back, remembering the days before.

As he turned and started walking away from the woods, he could swear he could hear the sobbing again.
The Cake and the Diamond

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

The Cake and the Diamond

by Athyn Muendil

I was in the Rat and the Pot, a foreigner cornerclub in Ald’ruhn, talking to my fellow Rats when I first saw the woman. Now, Breton women are fairly common in the Rat and the Pot. As a breed, they seem inclined to wander far from their perches in High Rock. Old Breton women, however, are not so migratory, and the wizened old biddy drew attention to herself, wandering about the room, talking to everyone.

Nimloth and Oediad were at their usual places, drinking their usual stuff. Oediad was showing off a prize he had picked up in some illicit manner—a colossal diamond, large as a baby’s hand, and clear as spring water. I was admiring it when I heard the creaking of old bones behind me.

“Good day to you, friends,” said the old woman. “My name is Abelle Chriditte, and I am in need of financial assistance to facilitate my transportation to Ald Redaynia.”

“You’ll want to see the Temple for charity,” said Nimloth curtly.

“I am not looking for charity,” said Abelle. “I’m looking to barter service.”

“Don’t make me sick, old woman,” laughed Oediad.

“Did you say your name was Abelle Chriditte?” I asked, “Are you related to Abelle Chriditte, the High Rock alchemist?”

“Closely related,” she cackled. “We are the same person. Perhaps I could prepare you a potion in exchange for gold? I noticed that you have in your possession a very fine diamond. The magical qualities of diamonds are boundless.”

“Sorry, old woman, I ain’t giving it up for magic. It was trouble enough stealing this one,” said Oediad. “I’ve got a fence who’ll trade it for gold.”

“But your fence will demand a certain percentage, will he not? What if I could give you a potion of invisibility in exchange? In return for that diamond, you could have the means to steal many more. A very fair exchange of services, I would say.”

“It would be, but I have no gold to give you,” said Oediad.

“I’ll take what remains of the diamond after I’ve made the potion,” said Abelle. “If you took it to the Mages Guild, you’d have to supply all the other ingredients and pay for it as well. But I learned my craft in the wild, where no Potion-makers existed to dissolve diamond into dust. When you must do it all by hand, by simple skill, you are blessed with remnants those fool potion-makers at the Guild simply swallow up.”
“That sounds all very nice,” said Nimloth, “but how do we know your potion is going to work? If you make one potion, take the rest of Oediad’s diamond, and leave, we won’t know until you’ve gone whether the potion works or not.”

“Ah, trust is so rare these days,” sighed Abelle. “I suppose I could make two potions for you, and there’d still be a little bit of diamond left for me. Not a lot, but perhaps enough to get me to Ald Redaynia. Then you could try the first potion right here and now, and see if you’re satisfied or not.”

“But,” I interjected, “you could make one potion that works and one that doesn’t, and take more of the diamond. She could even give you a slow-acting poison, and by the time she got to Ald Redaynia, you’d be dead.”

“Bleedin’ Kynareth, you Dunmer are suspicious! I will hardly have any diamond left, but I could make two potions of two doses each, so you can satisfy yourself that the potion works and has no negative effects. If you still don’t trust me, come along with me to my table and witness my craft if you’d like.”

So it was decided that I would accompany Abelle back to her table where she had all her travelling bags full of herbs and minerals, to make certain that she was not making two different potions. It took nearly an hour of preparation, but she kindly allowed me to finish her half-filled flagon of wine while I watched her work. Splintering the diamond and powdering the pieces required the bulk of the time; over and over again, she waved her gnarled hands over the gem, intoning ancient enchantments, breaking the facets of the stone into smaller and smaller pieces. Separately she made pastes of minced bittergreen, crushed red bulbs of dell’arco spae, and driblets of ciciliani oil. I finished the wine.

“Old woman,” I finally said with a sigh. “How much longer is this going to take? I’m getting tired of watching you work.”

“The Mages Guild has fooled the populace into thinking alchemy is a science,” she said. “But if you’re tired, rest your eyes.”

My eyes closed, seemingly of their own volition. But there had been something in that wine. Something that made me do what she asked.

“I think I’ll make up the potion as cakes. It’s much more potent that way. Now, tell me, young man, what will your friends do once I give them the potion?”

“Mug you in the street afterwards to retrieve the rest of the diamond,” I said simply. I didn’t want to tell the truth, but there it was.

“I thought so, but I wanted to be certain. You may open your eyes now.”

I opened my eyes. Abelle had made a small presentation on a wooden platter: two small cakes and a silver cutting knife.

“Pick up the cakes and bring them to the table,” said Abelle. “And don’t say anything, except to agree with whatever I say.”

I did as I was told. It was a curious sensation. I didn’t really mind being her puppet. Of course, in retrospect, I resent it, but it seemed perfectly natural at the time to obey without any question.

Abelle handed the cakes to Oediad and I dutifully verified that both cakes were made the same way. She suggested that he cut one of the cakes in half, and he would take one half and he’d take
the other, just so he would know that they worked and weren’t poisoned. Oediad thought it was a good idea, and used Abelle’s knife to cut the cake. Abelle took the piece on the left and popped it into her mouth. Oediad took the piece on the right and swallowed it more cautiously.

Abelle and all the bags she was carrying vanished from sight almost instantly. Nothing happened to Oediad.

“Why did it work for the witch and not for me?” cried Oediad.

“Because the diamond dust was only on the left-hand side of the blade,” said the old alchemist through me. I felt her control lessening as the distance grew and she hurried invisibly down the dark Ald’ruhn street away from the Rat and the Pot.

We never found Abelle Chriditte or the diamond. Whether she completed her pilgrimage to Ald Redaynia is anyone’s guess. The cakes had no effect, except to give Oediad a bad case of droops that lasted for nearly a week.
Catalogue of Armour Enchantments

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Complete Catalogue of Enchantments for Weapons

by Yvonne Bienne (Synod Researcher)

Within this catalogue are all the known varieties of weapon enchantments the modern mages can cast. No pretence is made that this list is complete. New discoveries are made and new enchantments are revealed after enough that this work will eventually become outdated. Those who follow may choose to revise this work as needed.

Weapons such as axes and bows can hold a wide variety of enchantments. The most common are fire, frost and lightning. The simple, yet effective enchantments burn, freeze or shock when they draw blood.

Only slightly less common are weapon enchantments that drain magicka or stamina. These drain off a wizard's reserve of power, tiring him magically just as the weapons that strain stamina tire their victim physically. Unlike the elemental enchantments, the enchantment [alone] cannot kill, although the weapon itself can still take a life.

Equally less common are the enchantments of fear. These are two varieties, one for the living, and one for the undead. The former will only affect living creatures, not undead, or magical constructs such as atronachs and dwarven automatons. The latter cause draugr, skeletons, vampires and the like to flee. There is no known fear enchantment that will affect dwarven machines.

A particularly insidious, but somewhat common enchantment, is soul trap. Upon entering the blood, the victim's soul is bound. Should he die shortly thereafter, his soul is siphoned off to a nearby soul gem. This form of magic should only be used against beasts and monsters. To use against men or elves is abhorrent.

Noticeably more rare are the absorb enchantments. There are three known types that drain the victim's health, magicka, or stamina. The weapon becomes a conduit, transferring the stolen energy from the victim to the wielder. As discussed above, absorbing magicka and stamina is not in itself deadly. Absorbing health can actually steal the life from a creature.

The rarest of enchantments are those of banishment and paralysation. Banishment only affects summoned atronachs or undead raised by wizards. The banishment breaks the link between the caster and the creature. Summoned atronach return to the Oblivion plane from whence they came. Raised undead are released. It is important that self-willed undead are not affected by banishment.

Paralysation is simple, yet deadly. The affected creature becomes rigid and unable to move for a short time. This is one of the most prized enchantments among warriors. A paralysed opponent can be dispatched with ease. It is important to note that many creatures are immune to paralysis, such as Atronachs, skeletons, ice wraiths, and dwarven automatons.
Catalogue of Weapon Enchantments

Chapter Notes

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Cats of Skyrim

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Cats of Skyrim

by Aldetuile

I have been sent to this frigid wasteland to catalogue and study any of its indigenous cats, which has so far been uneventful. After months of wandering I have so far only encountered some variations of the same basic species.

In my travels I have encountered several Khajiit outcast from their clans that have taken up residence in Skyrim. They have been most unhelpful, probably for fear I’d expose their locations. I can’t say I’m surprised that there are few Khajiit here, it’s cold and unwelcoming.

Sabrecats are basic giant cats that have evolved two dangerously sharp front teeth.

The average sabrecat has a reddish brown fur which it uses to blend into grassy regions, but I have observed them skulking and sleeping on rocks so I don’t believe the fur is used for camouflage.

The primary attacks of the sabrecat are its biting action, but it can also briefly rear up to attack with its front claws. I have also seen it pounce forward on its prey in a particularly powerful attack.

The snowy version of the sabrecat has spotted white fur which I believe it uses more for stalking more than its cousin in the plains.

The tooth of the cat is rumoured to be useful in potions that restore the imbiber’s stamina as well as a potion that will temporarily give a more keen eye for smithing.

Any skillful hunter can usually salvage the pelts and teeth of their kill, but report that the meat is tasteless and not fit to eat.
By the time she was sixteen, Minevah Iolos had been an unwelcome guest in every shop and manor in Balmora. Sometimes, she would take everything of value within; other times, it was enough to experience the pure pleasure of finding a way past the locks and traps. In either situation, she would leave a pair of dice in a prominent location as her calling card to let the owners know who had burgled them. The mysterious ghost became known to the locals as Chance.

A typical conversation in Balmora at this time:

My dear, whatever happened to that marvellous necklace of yours?

My dear, it was taken by Chance.

The only time when Chance disliked her hobby was when she miscalculated, and she came upon an owner or a guard. So far, she had never been caught, or even seen, but dozens of times she had uncomfortably close encounters. There came a day when she felt it was time to expand her reach. She considered going to Vivec or Gnisis. But one night at the Eight Plates, she heard a tale of the Heran Ancestral Tomb, an ancient tomb filled with traps and possessing hundreds of years of the Heran family treasures.

The idea of breaking the spell of the Heran Tomb and gaining the fortune within appealed to Chance, but facing the guardians was outside her experience. While she was considering her options, she saw Ulstyr Moresby sitting at a table nearby, by himself as usual. He was a huge brute of a Breton who had a reputation as a gentle eccentric, a great warrior who had gone mad and paid more attention to the voices in his head than to the world around him.

If she must have a partner in this enterprise, Chance decided, this man would be perfect. He would not demand or understand the concept of getting an equal share of the booty. If worse came to worse, he would not be missed if the inhabitants of the Heran Tomb were too much for him. Or if Chance found his company tiresome and elected to leave him behind.

“Ulstyr, I don’t think we’ve ever met, but my name is Minevah,” she said, approaching the table. “I’m fancying a trip to the Heran Ancestral Tomb. If you think you could handle the monsters, I could take care of unlocking doors and popping traps. What do you think?”

The Breton took a moment to reply, as if considering the counsel of the voices in his head. Finally he nodded his head in the affirmative, mumbling, “Yes, yes, yes, prop a rock, hot steel. Chitin. Walls beyond doors. Fifty-three. Two months and back.”

“Splendid,” said Chance, not the least put off by his ramblings. “We’ll leave early tomorrow.”
When Chance met Ulstyr the next morning, he was wearing chitin armour and had armed himself with an unusual blade that glowed faintly of enchantment. As they began their trek, she tried to engage him in conversation, but his responses were so nonsensical that she quickly abandoned the attempts. A sudden rainstorm swelled over the plain, dousing them, but as she was wearing no armour and Ulstyr was wearing slick chitin, their progress was not impeded.

Into the dark recesses of the Heran Tomb, they delved. Her instincts had been correct—they made very good partners.

She recognised the ancient snap-wire traps, deadfalls, and brittle backs before they were triggered, and cracked all manners of lock: simple tumbler, combination, twisted hasp, double catch, varieties from antiquity with no modern names, rusted heaps that would have been dangerous to open even if one possessed the actual key.

Ulstyr for his part slew scores of bizarre fiends, the likes of which Chance, a city girl, had never seen before. His enchanted blade’s spell of fire was particularly effective against the Frost Atronachs. He even saved her when she lost her footing and nearly plummeted into a shadowy crack in the floor.

“Not to hurt thyself,” he said, his face showing genuine concern. “There are walls beyond doors and fifty-three. Drain ring. Two months and back. Prop a rock. Come, Mother Chance.”

Chance had not been listening to much of Ulstyr’s babbling, but when he said “Chance,” she was startled. She had introduced herself to him as Minevah. Could it be that the peasants were right, and that mad men spoke, they were talking to the Daedra prince Sheogorath who gave them advice and information beyond their ken? Or was it rather, more sensibly, that Ulstyr was merely repeating what he heard tell of in Balmora where in the recent years “Chance” had become synonymous with lockpicking?

As the two continued on, Chance thought of Ulstyr’s mumblings. He had said “chitin” when they met as if it had just occurred to him, and the chitin armour that he wore had proven useful. Likewise, “hot steel.” What could “walls beyond doors” mean? Or “two months and back”? What numbered “fifty-three”?

The notion that Ulstyr possessed secret knowledge about her and the tomb they were in began to unnerve Chance. She made up her mind then to abandon her companion once the treasure had been found. He had cut through the living and undead guardians of the dungeon: if she merely left by the path they had entered, she would be safe without a defender.

One phrase he said made perfect sense to her: “drain ring.” At one of the manors in Balmora, she had picked up a ring purely because she thought it was pretty. It was not until later that she discovered that it could be used to sap other people’s vitality. Could Ulstyr be aware of this? Would he be taken by surprise if she used it on him?

She formulated her plan on how best to desert the Breton as they continued down the hall. Abruptly the passage ended with a large metal door, secured by a golden lock. Using her pick, Chance snapped away at the two tumblers and bolt, and swung the door open. The treasure of the Heran Tomb was within.

Chance quietly slipped her glove off one hand, exposing the ring as she stepped into the room. There were fifty-three bags of gold within. As she turned, the door closed between her and the Breton. On her side, it did not resemble a door anymore, but a wall. Walls beyond doors.

For many days, Chance screamed and screamed, as she tried to find a way out of the room. For
some days after that, she listened dully to the laughter of Sheogorath within her own head. Two months later, when Ulstyr returned, she was dead. He used a rock to prop open the door and remove the gold.
Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for fighting, but there's no death.

The Charwich-Koniinge Letters, Book I

*The Charwich-Koniinge Letter, Book I*

*by Charwich*

6 Sun’s Height, 3E 411
Kambria, High Rock

My Dear Koniinge,

I hope this letter reaches you in Sadrith Mora. It’s been many weeks since I’ve heard from you, and I hope that the address that I have for you is still up-to-date. I gave the courier some extra gold, so if he doesn’t find you, he is to make inquiries to your whereabouts. As you can see, after a rather tedious crossing, I’ve at long last made my way from Bhoriane to my favourite principality in High Rock, surprisingly literate and always fascinating Kambria. I at once ensconced myself in one of the better libraries here, becoming acquainted with the locals and the lore. At the risk of being overly optimistic, I think I might have struck on something very interesting about this mysterious fellow, Hadwaf Neithwyr.

Many here in town remember him, though few very fondly. When Hadwaf Neithwyr left, so too did a great plague. No one thinks it was a coincidence.

According to my contacts here, Azura is not his only master. It may be that when he summoned forth the Daedra and accepted her Star, he was doing so for someone named Baliasir. Apparently, Neithwyr worked for this Baliasir in some capacity, but I never could find out from anyone exactly what Baliasir’s line of business was, nor what Neithwyr did for him. Zenithar, the God of Work and Commerce, is the most revered deity in Kambria, which served my (that is to say our) purposes well, as the people are naturally receptive to bribery. Still, it did me little good. I could find nothing specific about our quarry. After days of inquiring, an old crone recommended that I go to a nearby village called Grimtry Garden, and find the cemetery caretaker there. I set off at once.

I know you are impatient when it comes to details, and have little taste for Breton architecture, but if you ever find yourself in mind-High Rock, you owe it to yourself to visit this quaint village. Like a number of similar towns in High Rock, there is a high wall surrounding it. As well as being picturesque, it’s a remnant of the region’s turbulent past and a useful barrier against the supernatural creatures that sometimes stalk the countryside. More about that in a moment.

The cemetery is actually outside of the city gates, I discovered. The locals warned me to wait until morning to speak to the caretaker, but I was impatient for information, and did not want to waste a moment. I trekked through the woods to the lonely graveyard, and immediately found the shuffling, elderly man who was the caretaker. He bade me leave, that the land was haunted and if I chose to stay I would be in the greatest danger. I told him that I would not go until he told me what he knew about Hadwaf Neithwyr and his patron Baliasir. On hearing their names, he fled deeper into the jumble of broken tombstones and decrepit mausoleums. I naturally pursued.
I saw him scramble down into an enormous crypt and gave chase. There was no light within, but I had planned enough to bring with me a torch. The minute I lit it, I heard a long, savage howl pierce the silence, and I knew that the caretaker had left quickly not merely because he feared speaking of Neithwyr and Baliasir. Before I saw the creature, I heard its heavy breath and clack of its clawed feet on stone moving closer to me. The werewolf emerged from the gloom, brown and black, with slavering jaws, looking at me with the eyes of the cemetery creature, now given only to animal hunger.

I instantly had three different instinctive reactions. The first was, of course, flight. The second was to fight. But if I fled, I might never mind the caretaker again, and learn what he knew. If I fought, I might injure or even kill the creature and be even worse off. So I elected to go with my third option: to hold my ground and keep the creature within its tomb until the night became morning, and the caretaker resumed his humanity.

I’ve sparred often enough unarmoured, but surely never with so much at stake, and never with so savage an opponent. My mind was always on danger not only of injury but the dread disease of lycanthropy. Every rake of its claws I parried, every snap of its foaming jaws I ducked. I sidestepped when it tried to rush me, but closed the distance to keep it from escaping into the night. For hours we fought, I always on the defence, it always trying to free itself, or slay me, or both. I have no doubt that the werewolf has greater energy reserves than a man, but it is a beast and does not know how to save and temper its movements. As the dawn rose, we were both nearly unconscious from fatigue, but I received my reward. The creature became a man once again.

He was quite considerably friendlier than he had been before. In fact, when he realised that I had prevented him from going on his nocturnal rampage through the countryside, he became positively affable.

Here’s what I learned: Neithwyr never returned to High Rock. As far as the old man knows, he is still in Morrowind. I visited the gravesite of his sister Peryra, and learned that it was probably through her that Neithwyr first met his patron. It would seem that she was quite a well-known courtesan in her day, and very well travelled, though she chose to return home to die. Unlike Neithwyr, Baliasir is not far away from me. He is a shadowy character, but lately, according to the caretaker, he has been paying court to Queen Elysana in Wayrest. I leave at once.

Please write to me as soon as possible to tell me of your progress. I should be in Wayrest at the home of my friend Lady Elysbetta Moorling in a week’s time. If Baliasir is at court, Lady Moorling will be able to arrange an introduction.

I feel very confident in saying that we are very close to Azura’s Star.

Your Friend,

Charwich
The Charwich-Koniinge Letters, v2

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for slight torture and death.

The Charwich-Koniinge Letter, Book II

by Koniinge

3 Last Seed, 3E 411
Tel Aruhn, Morrowind

My Good Friend Charwich,

I only just last week received your letter dated 6 Sun’s Height, addressed to me in Sadrith Mora. I did not know how to reach you before to tell you of my progress finding Hadwaf Neithwyr, so I send this to you now care of the lady you mentioned in your letter, the Lady Elysbetta Moorling of Wayrest. I hope that if you have left her palace, she will know where you’ve gone and can send this to you. And I hope further that you receive it in a timelier manner than I received your letter. It is essential that I hear from you soon so we may coordinate our next course of action.

My adventures here have two acts, one before I received your letter, and one immediately after. While you searched for the elusive possessor of Azura’s Star in his homeland to the west, I search for him here where we understood he conjured up the Daedra Prince and received from her the artefact.

Like you, I had little difficulty finding people who had heard of or even knew Neithwyr. In fact, not long after we parted company and you left for the Iliac Bay, I met someone who knew where he went to perform the ceremony, so I left at once to come here to Tel Aruhn. It took some time to locate my contact, for he is a Dissident Priest named Minerath. The Temple and Tribunal, the real powers of Morrowind, tend to frown on his Order, and while they haven’t begun so much of crusade to stamp them out, there are certainly rumours that they will soon. This tends to make priests like Minerath skittish and paranoid. Difficult people to set appointments with.

Finally I was told that he would be willing to talk to me at the Plot and Plaster, a tiny tavern without even a room to rent. Downstairs, there were several cloaked men crammed around the tavern’s only table, and they searched me to see if I had any weaponry. Of course, I hadn’t. You know that isn’t my preferred method of doing business.

When it was decided that I was harmless, one of the cloaked figures revealed himself to be Minerath. I paid him the gold I promised and asked him what he knew about Hadwaf Neithwyr. He remembered him well enough, saying that after he received the Star, the lad intended to return to High Rock. It seemed he had unfinished business there, presumably of a violent nature, which Azura’s Star would facilitate. He had no other information, and I did not know what else to ask.

We parted company and waited for your letter, hoping you had found Neithwyr and perhaps even the Star. I confess that as I lingered in Morrowind and never heard from you, I began to have doubts about your character. You’ll forgive me for saying so, but I began to fear that you had taken
the artefact for yourself. In fact, I was making plans to come to High Rock myself when your letter came at last.

The tale of your adventure in the cemetery at Grimtry Gardens, and the information you gathered from the lycanthrope caretaker inspired me to have another meeting with Minerath. Thus began the second act of my story.

I returned to the Pot and Plaster, reasoning that the priest must frequent that area of the city to feel so comfortable setting clandestine meetings there. It took some time searching, but I finally found him, and as luck would have it, he was alone. I called his name, and he quickly drew me to a dark alleyway, nervous that we would be seen by a Temple ordinator.

It is a rare and beautiful thing when a victim insists on dragging his killer to a remote location.

I began at once asking about this fellow you mentioned, Neithwyr’s mysterious patron Baliasir. He denied ever having heard the name. We were still in that easy, fairly conversational state when I attacked the priest. Of course, he was completely taken by surprise. In some ways, that can be more effective than an ambush from behind. No matter how many times I’ve done it, no one ever expected the friendly man they’re talking to grip them by the neck.

I pressed hard against my favourite spot in the soft part of the throat, just below the thyroid cartilage, and it took him too long to react to my lunge and try pushing back. He began to lose consciousness, and I whispered that if I released my grip a little so he could talk and breathe, but he tried to call for help, I would snap his neck. He nodded, and I relaxed the pressure, just a bit.

I asked him again about Baliasir, and he shook his head, insisting that he had never heard the name. As frightened as he was, it seemed most likely that he was telling the truth, so I asked him more generally if he knew anyone else who might know something about Hadwaf Neithwyr. He told me there was a woman present also during the ceremony, someone he introduced as his sister.

I remembered then the part of your letter about seeing the grave of Neithwyr’s sister, Peryra. When I mentioned the name to the priest he nodded frantically, but I could see that the interrogation had reached an ending. There is, after all, something about being throttled that causes a man to answer yes to every question. I snapped Minerath’s neck, and returned home.

So now I’m again unsure how to proceed. I’ve made several more inquiries and several of the same people who met Neithwyr remembered him being with a woman. A few recall him saying that she was his sister. One or two believe they remember her name as being Peryra, though they’re not certain. No one, however, has heard of anyone named Baliasir.

If I do not hear word from you in response to this in the next couple of weeks, I will come to High Rock, because it’s there that most people believe Neithwyr returned. I will only stay here long enough to see if there are any other inquiries I can make only in Morrowind to bring us closer to our goal of recovering Azura’s Star.

Your Friend,

Koniinge
Charwich-Koniinge Letters, v3

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warning for death.

The Charwich-Koniinge Letter, Book III

by Charwich

13 Last Seed, 3E 411
Wayrest, High Rock

My dear Koniinge,

Please forgive the quality of the handwriting on this note, but I have not long to live. I can only reply in detail to one part of your letter, and that is that I fear Baliasir, contrary to what you’ve heard, is very much real. Had he been but a figment of the caretaker’s imagination, I would not be feeling life ebb from me as I write this.

Lady Moorling has sent for healers, but I know they won’t arrive in time. I just need to explain what happened so that you’ll understand, and then all my affairs in this world will be ended. The one advantage of my condition is that I must be brief, without my habitual ornamental descriptions of people and places. I know that you will appreciate that at least.

It started when I came to Wayrest, and through my friend Lady Moorling and her court connections was introduced to Baliasir himself. I had to proceed carefully, not wanting him to know of our designs on Azura’s Star which I presumed he possessed, given to him by his servant Hadwaf Neithwyr. His function in Queen Elysana’s court seemed to be decorative, like so many of her courtiers, and it was not hard to differentiate myself from the others when we began conversing on the school of mysticism. Many of the other hangers-on at the palace can speak eloquently on the subject of the magickal arts, but it seemed that only he and I had deep knowledge of the craft.

Many a nobleman or adventurer who aren’t mages by profession learn a spell or two from the useful schools of restoration or destruction. I told Baliasir quite truthfully that I had never learned any of that (oh, but I wish I knew some healing spells from the school of restoration now), but that I had developed some small skill in mysticism. Not enough to me a Psijic, of course, but in telekinesis, password, and spell reflection I had some amateur ability. He responded with compliments, which allowed me to segue into the topic of another spell of mysticism, the soul trap.

I told him I was unlearned but curious about that spell. Any very naturally and comfortably, I was able to bring up the subject of Azura’s Star, the endless well of souls.

Imagine how I had to hold back my excitement when he leaned in and whispered to me, “If that interests you, come to Klythic’s Cairn west of the city tomorrow night.”

I couldn’t sleep at all. The only thing I could think of was how I would get the Star when he showed it to me. I still knew so little of Baliasir, his past and his power, but the opportunity was too great to let it pass. Still, I held hopes that you would arrive, as you threatened you might in your
letter, so I might have someone of physical strength to aid me in my adventure.

I am growing weaker and weaker as I write this, so I must proceed with the basic facts. I went to the crypt the following night, and Baliasir led me through the maze of it to the repository where he kept the Star. We were talking quite casually, and as you’ve so often said, it seemed an excellent time for an ambush. I grabbed the Star and unsheathed my blade in what I felt was amazing speed.

He turned to me and I suddenly felt like I was moving like a snail. In a flash, Baliasir changed his form and became his true self, not man or mer, but daedra. A colossal daedra lord who swiped back the Star from my grasp and laughed at my sword as it thudded against his impenetrable hide.

I knew I had been beaten, and I threw myself towards the corridor. A blue flash of energy coursed through me, flung by Baliasir’s claws. At once, I began to feel death. He could have smote me with a thousand spells, but he chose the one where I could lie down, and suffer, and hear him laugh. At the very least, I did not give him that pleasure.

Already struck, it was too late for me to cast a counterspell of mysticism, one to dispel the magicka, reflect it or absorb it as my own. But I did still know how to teleport myself, what mystics term ‘Recall’, to whatever place I’d last set a spiritual anchor. I confess that at the time, I didn’t remember where that would be. Perhaps in Bhoriane when I arrived in the Iliac Bay, or in Kambria, or in Grimtry Garden where I met the caretaker, or my hostess’s palace in Wayrest. I prayed that I had not set the anchor last when I was with you in Morrowind, for it said that if the distance was too great, one can be caught between dimensions. Still, I was willing to take that chance, rather than being the plaything of Baliasir.

I cast the spell and found myself back on the doorstep of Lady Moorling’s palace. To be out of the crypt and away from the daedra was a relief, but I had so hoped that I had been smart enough to cast an anchor near a Mages Guild or a temple where I could find a healer. Instead, knowing I was too weak to walk far, I beat on the door and was taken here, where I write this letter, lying in my bed.

As I wrote those words, dear Elysbetta, Lady Moorling, came in, quite tearfully and frantic, to tell me the healers should be here waiting but a few minutes. But I will be dead when they arrive. I know these are my last words. There friend, stay away from this cursed place.

Your friend,

Charwich
The Charwich-Koniinge Letters, v4

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for torture and death.

Sorry it's been a while! I had camp and then I got into a twitch series called Critical Role, and it was so good I haven't written in ages. But here's the last volume of the Charwich-Koniinge letters, I hope you like it.

The Charwich-Koniinge Letter, Book IV

by Syrix Goinithi

8 Sun’s Dawn, 3E 412
Amiglith, Summerset Isle

My Good Friend, Lord Gemyn,

You must forgive me for not meeting you at the palace personally, but I’ve been unavoidably, tragically detained. I’ve left the front gate and door unlocked, and if you’re reading this, you must have made it at least as far as the antechamber to the east drawing room. Perhaps you’ve already wandered the estate and seen some of its delights before coming to this chamber: the seven fountains of marble and porphyry, the reflecting pool, the various groves, the colonnades and quincunx. I don’t think you would have already gone to the second floor suites and the west wing as you would have had to pass this room first, and picked up this letter. But believe me, they’re beautifully appointed with magnificent balustrades, winding staircases, intimate salons, and bedchambers worthy of your affluence.

The price of this property is exorbitant, certainly, but for a man like you who seeks only the best, this is the villa you must have. As you undoubtedly noticed as you arrived through the gates, there are several smaller buildings ideally suited to be guard stations. I know you are concerned with security.

I am an intensely greedy man, and there is nothing I would have liked more than to meet you here today, show you the grounds, fawn on you obsequiously, and collect a fat percentage of the cost of the sale when you bought this marvellous palace, as I’m sure you would have. My dilemma that caused my inexcusable absence began shortly after I arrived here early to make certain the villa was well-cleaned for your inspection. A man named Koniinge crept up behind me, and gripped me by the throat. Clamping his left hand over my mouth and nose, and throttling me with his right hand, crushing the soft spot on my throat just below the thyroidal cartilage, he effectively strangled me in a few quick but very painful minutes.

I am currently buried in a pile of leaves in the north statuary parterre, close to the exceptional sculptural representation of the Transformation of Trinimac. It should not be too long before I am discovered: someone at my bank will surely notice my absence in due time. Koniinge might have buried me deeper, but he wanted to be ready for the arrival of his old partner, Charwich.

Perhaps part of you thinks it best to stop reading now, Lord Gemyn. You are looking around the
antechamber and seeing nothing but doors. The large one you took to come in from the garden is locked now behind you, and without a better knowledge of the layout of the estate, I could not recommend you attempt to flee down a corridor that might easily come to a dead end. No. Much better to keep reading, and see where this is going.

Koniinge, it seems, was in a partnership with his friend Charwich to try to recover Azura’s Star. They understood it to be in the possession of someone named Hadwaf Neithwyr, a man who conjured up the Daedra Prince Azura herself to acquire it. As Neithwyr originally hailed from High Rock, Charwich went there to look for him, while his partner searched Morrowind. They planned to communicate their findings by letters sent through couriers.

Charwich’s first letter stated that he had found information that Neithwyr had a mysterious patron named Baliasir, a fact he had learned at a cemetery with a gravestone of Neithwyr’s sister Peryra and a lycanthropic caretaker. Koniinge replied back that he could find nothing on Baliasir, but believed Neithwyr had returned to High Rock with Peryra after getting the Star. Charwich’s last letter was written on his deathbed, having sustained mortal wounds from his battle with Baliasir, who it seemed had been a mighty daedra lord.

Koniinge grieved for his friend, and travelled the span of the Empire to Wayrest, to pay his call of condolences on Lady Moorling, the woman who at whose house Charwich had been staying. After making some inquiries, Koniinge learned that her ladyship had left the city, quite suddenly. She had been entertaining a guest named Charwich, and it was understood that he had died, though no one ever saw the body. Certainly no healers had been sent to her house on the 13th of Last Seed of last year. And no one in Wayrest, just like no one in Tel Aruhn, had ever heard of Baliasir.

Poor Koniinge was suddenly unsure of everything. He retraced his partner’s path through Bhoriane and Grimtry Gardens, but found that the Neithwyr crypt was elsewhere, in a small town in the barony of Dwynnen. There was indeed a lycanthropic caretaker, fortunately in human form at the time. When questioned (using the technique of strangulation, release, strangulation, release), he told Koniinge the story that he had told Charwich many months before.

Hadwaf and Peryra Neithwyr had returned to Dwynnen, intent on settling old business. As the Star requires potent spirits for power, they thought they would begin small by capturing the spirit of a werewolf they knew of in the family graveyard. Sadly, for them, their grasp exceeded their reach. When the poor caretaker resumed his human form one morning, he found himself lying next to the shredded, bloody bodies of the Neithwyr siblings. Distressed and fearful, he brought the corpses and all their possessions down into the crypt. They were still there when Charwich came, and so too was Azura’s Star.

Koniinge now saw things clearly. The letters he had received from Charwich were lies, intended to keep him away. Undoubtedly with the assistance of Lady Moorling, his new partner, he had concocted stories, including one of his own demise, to trick Koniinge into abandoning the quest for the Star. It was clearly a sad statement on the nature of friendship, and one that needed immediate correction.

It took the better part of six months for Koniinge to find his old partner. Charwich and Lady Moorling had used the power of the Star to make themselves very wealthy and powerful. They assumed a number of different identities in their travels through High Rock and Skyrim, and then down to Valenwood and the Summerset Isle. Along the way, of course, the Star disappeared, as great daedric artefacts always do. The couple still had much wealth, but their love sadly fell on troubled times. When they reached Alinor, they parted ways.

One must assume that during their months together, Charwich must have told Lady Moorling about
Koniinge. It’s pleasant to think of the loving couple laughing over the stories they were telling him about the mythical and dangerous Baliasir. Charwich must not have given his former beloved a very accurate physical description, however, because when Lady Moorling (then under the identity of the Countess Zyliana) met Koniinge, she had no idea who he was. It came as quite a surprise to her when he began strangling her and requesting information about her former paramour.

Before she died, she told Koniinge what Charwich’s new name and title was, and where he was looking for a new palace. She even told him about me. Given all twists and bends the last months’ chase took him on, it was not difficult to find which palace Charwich was looking to buy, and what time his appointment was to view it. Then he had merely to arrive early, dispose of me, and wait.

There our story must sadly end. I look forward to seeing you soon.

Yours,

Syrix Goinithi,

Former Estate Banker

P.S.: Charwich—Turn around now, or don’t. Your choice. Your friend, Koniinge.
Chaurus Pie: A Recipe

by Nils

If I have to hear one more time about that famous gourmet who wrote that recipe book, I’ll hack off my own ears with a blunt axe.

Sure, he can cook up some dishes fit for them stodgy Imperials and them poncy Bretons, but real Nords want real Nord food, and my Chaurus pie is just that.

I guess I have been complaining a lot about it, cause Susanna was yelling at me. Nils, she says, if your chaurus pie is so good, you should write down the recipe.

Well, I ain’t good with my letters and I got no talent for writing, but I thought why not give it a go? So this here’s my first ever recipe that I wrote down and I hope you like it.

First thing you’ll need is some chaurus meat and that ain’t easy to come by. Chauruses mostly live in caves, and as like as not they share them caves with other nasty things.

If you go hunting for chaurus meat to make some dinner with, make sure you don’t end up as dinner yourself. Haha.

Anyway, as I was saying, get yourself some good armour and a nice big sword, and if you’ve got some stout men who won’t run off at the first sight of trouble—in other words, not like one of them poncy Bretons—then go looking in caves and you’ll find a chaurus sooner or later.

They look like big bugs the size of really big dogs, and mind you watch out for that acid they spit. That’ll ruin your armour pretty quick.

Now once you got some chaurus meat, you got to put it on a spit. Make sure you get that white, thick meat from the midsection. Don’t use that yellow meat from the head or legs, because that’s got poisonous acid in it and if you eat it, you’ll probably die.

So you cook up your chaurus on the spit. And you want to baste it with sauce. To make that, grind up some tomatoes into pulp and then mix that with water, peppers, honey, and salt. And then you have to boil it all together.

I wouldn’t use too many peppers, but you want a few spoons of salt. How much honey you use is up to you. Depends on how sweet you want it.

When the chaurus is done and you’ve basted it enough, then you’ll want to bake it in a pie with some potatoes, carrots and apples. and put the rest of that sauce you made in there, too.

If you want turnips, sometimes they’re good. Depends on what you’re in the mood for.
Then you cook that for awhile. Look for the top to be light brown, that’s when you know it’s done.

And that’s it. Easy as pie. Haha.
Contemporary with Maqamat Lusign (interviewed in volume seventeen of this series) is the Khajiiti Cherim, whose tapestries have been hailed as masterpieces all over the Empire for nigh on thirty years now. His four factories located throughout Elsweyr make reproductions of his work, but his original tapestries command stellar prices. The Emperor himself owns ten Cherim tapestries, and his representatives are currently negotiating the sale of five more.

The muted use of colour contrasted with the luminous skin tones of Cherim’s subjects is a marked contrast with the old style of tapestry. The subjects of his work in recent years have been fabulous tales of the ancient past: the Gods meeting to discuss the formation of the world; the Chimer following the Prophet Veloth into Morrowind; the Wild Elves battling Morihaus and his legions at the White-Gold Tower. His earliest designs dealt more with contemporary subjects. I had the opportunity to discuss with him one of his first masterpieces, The Heart of Anequina, at his villa in Orcrest.

The Heart of Anequina presents a historical view of the Five Year War between Elsweyr and Valenwood which ranged from 3E 394 (or 3E 395, depending on what one considers to be the beginning of the war) until 3E 399. In most fair accounts, the war laster 4 years and 9 months, but artistic license from the great epic poets added an additional three months to the ordeal.

The actual details of the battle itself, as interpreted by Cherim, are explicit. The faces of a hundred and twenty Wood Elf archers can be differentiated one from the other, each registering fear at the approach of the Khajiiti army. Their hauberks catch the dim light of the sun. The menacing shadows of the Elsweyr battlecats loom on the hills, every muscles strained, ready to pounce in command. It is not surprising that he got all the details right, because Cherim was in the midst of it, as a Khajiiti foot soldier.

Every minute part of the Khajiiti medium-weight armour can be seen in the soldiers in the foreground. The embroidered edging and striped patterns on the tunics. Each lacquered plate on loose-fitting leather in Elsweyr style. The helmets of cloth and fluted silver.

“Cherim does not understand the point of plate mail,” said Cherim. “It is hot, for one, like being both burned and buried alive. Cherim wore it at the insistence of our Nord advisors during the Battle of Zelinin, and Cherim couldn’t even turn to see what my fellow Khajiit were doing. Cherim did some sketches for a tapestry of the Battle of Zelinin, but Cherim finds that to make it realistic, the figures came out very mechanical, like iron golems or dwemer centurions. Knowing our Khajiiti commanders, Cherim would not be surprised if giving up the heavy plate was more aesthetic than...
“Elsweyr lost the Battle of Zelinin, didn’t she?”

“Yes, but Elsweyr won the war, starting at the next battle, the Heart of Anequina,” said Cherim with a smile. “The tide turned as soon as we Khajiit sent our Nord advisors back to Solitude. We had to get rid of all the heavy armour they brought to us and find enough traditional medium armour our troops felt comfortable wearing. Obviously, the principle advantage of the medium armour was that we could move easily in it, as you can see from the natural stances of the soldiers in the tapestry.

“Now if you look at this poor perforated Cathay-raht who just keeps battling on in the bottom background, you see the other advantage. It seems strange to say, but one of the best features of medium armour is that an arrow will either deflect completely or pass all the way through. An arrow head is like a hook, made to stick where it strikes if it doesn’t pass through. A soldier in medium armour will find himself with a hole in his body and the bolt on the other side. Our healers can fix such a wound easily if it isn’t fatal, but if the arrow still remains in the armour, as it does with heavier armour, the wound will reopen every time the fellow moves. Unless the Khajiit strips off the armour and pulls out the arrow, which is what we had to do at the Battle of Zelinin. A difficult and time-consuming process in the heat of battle, to say the least.”

I asked him next, “Is there a self portrait in the battle?”

“Yes,” Cherim said with another grin. “You see the small figure of the Khajiit stealing the rings off the dead Wood Elf? His back is facing you, but he has a brown and orange striped tail like Cherim’s. Cherim does not say that all stereotypes about the Khajiit are fair, but Cherim must sometimes acknowledge them.”

A self-depreciating style in self-portraiture is also evident in the tapestries of Ranulf Hook, the next artist interviewed in volume nineteen of this series.
Nords consider themselves to be the children of the sky. The call Skyrim the Throat of the World, because it is where the sky exhaled the North Winds on the lands and formed them. They see themselves as eternal outsiders and invaders, and even when they conquer and rule another people; they feel no kinship with them (this especially with the Chimer and Dwemer in the days of the Dwemereth and the first forming of the Great Houses).

The breath and the voice are the vital essence of a Nord. When they defeat great enemies they take their tongues as trophies. They are woven into robes and can hold speech like an enchantment. The power of a Nord can be articulated in a “dragon” shout, like the kiai of an Akaviri swordsman. The strongest of their warriors are called “Tongues”. When the Nords attack a city, they take no siege engines or cavalry; the Tongues form in a wedge in front of the gatehouse, and draw in breath. When the leader lets it out in a kiai, the doors are blown in, and the axemen rush into the city. Shouts can be used to sharpen blades or to strike enemies. A common effect is the shout that knocks an enemy back, or the power of command. A strong Nord can instil bravery in men with his battle-cry, or stop a charging warrior with a roar. The greatest of the Nords can call to specific people over hundreds of miles, and can move by casting a shout, appearing where it lands.

The most powerful Nords cannot speak without causing destruction. They must go gagged, and communicate through a sign language and through scribing runes.

The further north you go into Skyrim, the more powerful and elemental the people become, and the less they require dwellings and shelters. Wind is fundamental to Skyrim and the Nords; those that live in the far wastes always carry a wind with them.
A Children's Anuad

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for war and death.

A Children’s Anuad: The Anuad Paraphrased

by Anonymous

The first ones were brothers: Anu and Padomay. They came into the Void, and Time began.

As Anu and Padomay wandered the Void, the interplay of Light and Darkness created Nir. Both Anu and Padomay were amazed and delighted with her appearance, but she loved Anu, and Padomay retreated from them in bitterness.

Nir became pregnant, but before she gave birth, Padomay returned, professing his love for Nir. She told him that she loved only Anu, and Padomay beat her in rage. Anu returned, fought Padomay, and cast him outside Time. Nir gave birth to Creation, but died from her injuries soon after. Anu, grieving, hid himself in the sun and slept.

Meanwhile, life sprang up on the twelve worlds of creation and flourished. After many ages, Padomay was able to return to Time. He saw Creation and hated it. He swung his sword, shattering the twelve worlds in their alignment. Anu awoke, and fought Padomay again. The long and furious battle ended with Anu the victor. He cast aside the body of his brother, who he believed was dead, and attempted to save Creation by forming the remnants of the 12 worlds into one—Nirn, the world of Tamriel. As he was doing so, Padomay struck him through the chest with one last blow. Anu grappled with his brother and pulled them both outside Time forever.

The blood of Padomay became the Daedra. The blood of Anu became the stars. The mingled blood of both became the Aedra (hence their capacity for good and evil, and their greater affinity for earthly affairs than the Daedra, who have no connection to Creation).

On the world of Nirn, all was chaos. The only survivors of the twelve worlds of Creation were the Ehlnofey and the Hist. The Ehlnofey are the ancestors of Mer and Men. The Hist are the trees of Argonia. Nirn originally was all land, with interspersed seas, but no oceans.

A large fragment of the Ehlnofey world landed on Nirn relatively intact, and the Ehlnofey living there were the ancestors of the Mer. These Ehlnofey fortified their borders from the chaos outside, hid their pocket of calm, and attempted to live on as before. Other Ehlnofey arrived on Nirn scattered amid the confused jumble of the shattered worlds, wandering and finding each other over the years. Eventually, the wandering Ehlnofey found the hidden land of Old Ehlnofey, and were amazed and joyful to find their kin living amid the splendour of ages past. The wandering Ehlnofey expected to be welcomed into a peaceful realm, but the Old Ehlnofey looked on them as degenerates, fallen from their former glory. For whatever reason, war broke out, and raged across the whole of Nirn. The Old Ehlnofey retained their ancient power and knowledge, but the Wanderers were more numerous, and toughened by their long struggle to survive on Nirn. This war reshaped the face of Nirn, sinking much of the land beneath new oceans, and leaving the lands as we know them (Tamriel, Akavir, Atmora, and Yokuda). The Old Ehlnofey realm, although ruined,
became Tamriel. The remnants of the Wanderers were left divided on the other 3 continents.

Over many years, the Ehlnofey of Tamriel became the Mer (Elves):

- The Dwemer (the Deep Ones, sometimes called Dwarves)
- The Chimer (the Changed Ones, who later became the Dunmer)
- The Dunmer (the Dark or Changed Ones, the Dark Elves)
- The Bosmer (the Green or Forest Ones, the Wood Elves)
- The Altmer (the Elder or High Ones, the High Elves)

On the other continents, the Wandering Ehlnofey became the Men: the Nords of Atmora, the Redguards of Yokuda, and the Tsaesci of Akavir.

The Hist were bystanders in the Ehlnofey war, but most of their realm was destroyed as the war passed over it. A small corner of it survived to become Black Marsh in Tamriel, but most of their realm was sunk beneath the sea.

Eventually, Men returned to Tamriel. The Nords were the first, colonising the northern coast of Tamriel before recorded history, led by the legendary Ysgramor. The thirteenth of his line, King Harald, was the first to appear in written history. And so the Mythic Era ended.
Chimarvamidium

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for war.

Ancient Tales of the Dwemer
Part VI: Chimarvamidium

by Marobar Sul

After many battles, it was clear who would win the War. The Chimer had great skills in magick and bladery, but against the armoured battalions of the Dwemer, clad in the finest shielding wrought by Jnaggo, there was little hope of their ever winning. In the interest of keeping some measure of peace in the Land, Sthovin the Warlord agreed to a truce with Karenithil Barif the Beast. In exchange for the Disputed Lands, Sthovin gave Barif a mighty golem, which would protect the Chimer’s territory from the excursions of the Northern Barbarians.

Barif was delighted with his gift and brought it back to his camp, where all his warriors gaped in awe at it. Sparkling gold in hue, it resembled a Dwemer cavalier with a proud aspect. To test its strength, they placed the golem in the centre of an arena and flung magickal bolts of lightning at it. Its agility was such that few of the bolts struck it. It had the wherewithal to pivot on its hips to avoid the brunt of the attacks without losing balance, feel firmly planted on the ground. A vault of fireballs followed, which the golem ably dodged, bending its knees and its legs to spin around the blasts. The few times it was struck, it made certain to be hit in the chest and waist, the strongest parts of its body.

The troops cheered at the sight of such an agile and powerful creation. With it leading the defence, the Barbarians of Skyrim would never again successfully raid their villages. They named it Chimarvamidium, the Hope of the Chimer.

Barif has the golem brought to his chambers with all his housethanes. There they tested Chimarvamidium further, its strength, its speed, its resiliency. They could find no flaw with its design.

“Imagine when the naked barbarians first meet this on one of their raids,” laughed one of the housethanes.

“It is only unfortunate that it resembles a Dwemer instead of one of our own,” mused Karenithil Barif. “It is revolting to think they they will have a greater respect for our other enemies than us.”

“I think we never should never accepted the peace terms that we did,” said another, one of the most aggressive of the housethanes. “Is it too late to surprise the warlord Sthovin with an attack?”

“It is never too late to attack,” said Barif. “But what of his great armoured warriors?”

“I understand,” said Barif’s spymaster, “that his soldiers always wake at dawn. If we strike an hour before, we can catch them defenceless, before they’ve had a chance to bathe, let alone don their armour.”
“If we capture their armourer Jnaggo, then we too would know the secrets of blacksmithery,” said Barif. “Let it be done. We attack tomorrow, an hour before dawn.”

So it was settled. The Chimer army marched at night, and swarmed into the Dwemer camp. They were relying on Chimarvamidium to lead the first wave, but it malfunctioned and began attacking the Chimer’s own troops. Added to that, the Dwemer were fully armoured, well-rested, and eager for battle. The surprise was turned, and most of the high-ranking Chimer, including Karenithil Barif the Beast, were captured.

Though they were too proud to ask, Sthovin explained to them that he had been warned of their attack by a Calling by one of his men.

“What man of yours is in our camp?” sneered Barif.

Chimarvamidium, standing erect by the side of the captured, removed its head. Within its metal body was Jnaggo, the armourer.

“A Dwemer child of eight can create a golem,” he explained. “But only a truly great warrior and armourer can pretend to be one.”

Publisher’s Note

This is one of the few tales in this collection, which can actually be traced to the Dwemer. The wording of the story is quite different from older versions in Aldmeris, but the essence is the same. “Chimarvamidium” may be the Dwemer “Nchmarthurnidamz”. This word occurs several times in plans of Dwemer armour and Animunculi, but it’s meaning is not known. It is most certainly not “Hope of the Chimer”, however.

The Dwemer were probably the first to use heavy armours. It is important to note how a man dressed in armour could fool many of the Chimer in this story. Also note how the Chimer warriors react. When this story was first told, armour that covered the whole body must have still been uncommon and new, whereas even then, Dwemer creations like golems and centurions were well known.

In a rare scholarly moment, Marobar Sul leaves a few pieces of the original story intact, such as parts of the original line in Aldmeris, “A Dwemer of eight can create a golem, but an eight of Dwemer can become one.”

Another aspect of this legend that scholars like myself find interesting is the mention of “the Calling”. In this legend and in others, there is a suggestion that the Dwemer race as a whole had some sort of silent and magickal communication. There are records of the Psijic Order which suggests they, too, share this secret. Whatever the case, there are no documented spells of “calling”. The Cyrodiil historian Borgusilus Malier first proposed this as a solution to the disappearance of the Dwemer. He theorised that in 1E 668, the Dwemer enclaves were called together by one of their powerful philosopher-sorcerers (“Kargnak” in some documents) to embark on a great journey, one of such sublime profundity that they abandoned all their cities and lands to join the quest to foreign climes as an entire culture.
Chronicles of Nchuleft

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for death and it being extremely boring.

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Chronicles of Nchuleft

by Anonymous Altmer

A historical chronicle of events in the Dwemer Freehold Colony of Nchuleft—This is a chronicle of events of historical significance to the Dwemer Freehold Colony of Nchuleft. The text was probably recorded by an Altmer, for it is written in Aldmeris.

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23. The Death of Lord Ihlendam

It happened in Second Planting (P.D. 1220) that Lord Ihlendam, on a journey in the Western Uplands, came to Nchuleft; and Protector Anchard and General Rkunghunch met him there, and Dalen-Zanchu also came to this meeting. They talked together long by themselves; but this only was known of their business, that they were to be friends of each other. They parted, and each went home to his own colony.

Bluthanch and her sons came to hear of this meeting, and saw in this secret meeting a treasonable plot against the Councils; and they often talked of this among themselves. When spring came, the Councils proclaimed, as usual, a Council Meet, in the halls of Bamz-Amschend. The people accordingly assembled, handfasted with ale and song, drinking bravely, and much and many things were talked over at the drink-table, and, among other things, were comparisons between different dwemer, and at last among the Councillors themselves.

One said that Lord Ihlendam excelled his Councillors by far, and in every way. At this Councillor Bluthanch was very angry, and said that she was in no way less than Lord Ihlendam, and that she was eager to prove it. Instantly both parties were so inflamed that they challenged each other to battle, and ran to their arms. But some citizens, who were less drunk, and more understanding, came between them, and quieted them; and each went back to his colony, but no one expected that they would ever meet in peace again together.

But then, in the fall, Lord Ihlendam received a message from Councillor Bluthanch, inviting him to a parlay at Hendor-Stardumz. And all Ihlendam’s kin and citizens strongly urged him not to come, fearing treachery, but Lord Ihlendam would not listen to counsel, not even to carrying with him his honour guard. And sadly, it came to pass that, while travelling to Hendor-Stardumz, in Chinzinch Pass, a host of foul creatures set upon Lord Ihlendam and killed him, and all of his party. And many citizens said thereafter that Bluthanch and her sons had conjured these beasts and set them upon Lord Ihlendam, but nothing was proven. Lord Ihlendam lies buried at a place called Leftunch.
8th of Evening Star 4E 186

As I begin this new phase of my life, I have decided to finally keep a journal. So much has happened to me thus far, both within the Brotherhood and without—when I think there is no record of what has transpired, it almost seems an affront to Sithis himself. So I am determined to make amends.

Yes, the Dark Brotherhood has its own scribes and chroniclers, but it is their solemn task to record those events deemed important to the organisation as a whole. Let this volume serve as the personal record of one man, a lowly assassin who has pledged his blade and his life for the Dark Brotherhood.

23rd of Evening Star 4E 186

I have arrived safely in the Cheydinhal Sanctuary, and have been greeted warmly by Rasha and the others. Indeed, the level of support and acceptance shown by my new family is rather overwhelming. For this sanctuary knows suffering, knows sorrow, for the ghosts of Purification still haunts its halls. So, who better to understand the plight of a brother who has lost his home and heart? Who better to comfort one whose Sanctuary is no more?

The Bruma Sanctuary may be gone, but my dearest brothers and sisters will live forever in my dreams, just as their souls live forever by the Dread Father’s side.

1st of Rain’s Hand 4E 187

Completed the baroness contract. She died well. Her handmaiden, less so.

12th of Rain’s Hand 4E 187

Cheydinhal suits me. With the destruction or abandonment of the other Sanctuaries, our contracts are plentiful, and are our bonuses.

Still, we seem to be losing our foothold throughout Tamriel at an alarming rate. There are rumours that the Black Hand is split on our continued direction. Some favour expansion, the others consolidation.

My personal feeling is that the Dark Brotherhood needs to, at the very least, maintain the illusion of being everywhere at once. It has become exceedingly difficult to fulfil (or even establish) contracts in provinces where we no longer have a physical presence, like Hammerfell. The more
we ignore Tamriel, the more people lose faith in the Dark Brotherhood—our power, our services, our dedication to the Void.

27th of Rain’s Hand 4E 187

The Listener, Alissan Dupre, has been visiting with us for several days, down from her private residence in Bravil. She and Rasha had been discussing the possibility of re-opening the Shadowscale training facility of Archon, in Black Marsh, but ultimately decided we lacked the resources to follow through with the plan.

27th of Rain’s Hand 4E 187

Completed the Arena contract. I ultimately decided to pose as a starstruck fan, and immediately got into the Grand Champion’s good graces. While escorting the arrogant fool through the Great Forest, I slashed his throat and left the corpse for the bears.
Cicero's Journal - Volume 2

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for death, murder, and the death of a child.

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Cicero’s Journal - Volume 2

7th of Sun’s Height 4E 188

Wayrest is lost. The city fell to corsairs, and it’s just a matter of time before the Sanctuary is breached. May the Night Mother watch over her children in their hour of need.

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5th of Last Seed 4E 188

We received word today—the Wayrest Sanctuary was raided and destroyed by the corsairs. There were no survivors.

There are now only three active Dark Brotherhood strongholds remaining: The Cheydinhal Sanctuary, here in the Imperial Province; a remote Sanctuary located in the forests of Skyrim; and the Corinthe Sanctuary of Elsweyr.

The Black Hand has ordered the Corinthe Sanctuary closed, and its members integrated into our own ranks here, in Cheydinhal. I will embrace those new family members as warmly as I was, when I first made my way here.

---

27th of Hearthfire 4E 188

The situation in Bravil grows more dire. The city has erupted in violence, due to a war of control being waged by Cyrodiil’s two largest skooma traffickers. The Listener, Alisanne Dupre, has been forced to employ sellswords to protect her own residence.

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1st of Sun’s Dusk 4E 188

Things with Bravil have come to a head. The statue of the Lucky Old Lady has been destroyed, and Alisanne Dupre as left her residence to guard the crypt of the Night Mother, hidden below the remains of the statue. If the crypt is discovered, Alisanne Dupre will, of course, protect the remains of the Unholy Matron until her dying breath.

Rasha is sending Garnag and Andronica to aid in the crypt’s defence. I begged to accompany them, but Rasha wouldn’t have it. He says my place is here, defending this Sanctuary, and I must of course respect that decision.

---

12th of Sun’s Dusk 4E 188
Botched my contract and forfeited the bonus. The silk merchant was already cold, and I was halfway through the window, when her daughter stepped into the room. I had little choice at that point.

21st of Sun’s Dusk 4E 188

So much has happened since my last entry. After Garnag and Andronica left for Bravil, we stopped receiving communications from the city. We feared the worst. This morning, those fears were confirmed, when Garnag returned alone, transporting a most precious cargo—the great stone coffin of the Night Mother herself.

The story Garnag told could curl the blood of even the most hardened of Sithis’ servants. The crypt of the Night Mother, raided. Dearest sister Andronica, cut to pieces. And the Listener herself, the most honoured Alisanne Dupre, burned alive in a storm of mage fire.

Garnag, though gravely injured (he will most certainly lose his right eye), managed to fend off the attackers, and transport the Night Mother’s coffin safely out of the city. He has been on the road, making his way back here, since that tragic night.
23rd Sun’s Dusk 4E 188

Now that things have settled down, the reality of our situation has finally come to bear—we are a Dark Brotherhood without a Listener. With no Listener, the Black Sacrament will go unheard. Surely the Night Mother will speak to someone soon, thus choosing a new Listener to take Alisanne Dupre’s place. Until that happens, though, we must take to the streets. We must hear the pleas of the desperate and vengeful. The people of Tamriel must not know, must never know, that their prayers to the Night Mother are going unheard.

24th of Morning Star 4E 189

It is a new year, and two months since the Night Mother first arrived here at the Cheydinhal Sanctuary, and still the Unholy Matron has not seen fit to speak to any one of us.

And so, Rasha has decided to revive an ancient Dark Brotherhood tradition—the appointing of a Keeper, a guardian whose sole duty is the safeguarding of the Night Mother’s remains. The remaining members of the Black Hand will make their decision tomorrow.

25th of Morning Star 4E 189

I have been chosen. By some incomprehensible twist of fate, the Black Hand has named me the Night Mother’s Keeper. In all honesty, I am both incredibly honoured and deeply saddened. This means the end of my contracts. I’ll be lucky to lift a blade again. Thankfully, Rasha has promised me one final contract before I accept my new duties.

30th of Morning Star 4E 189

The Jester lies dead. My final contract has been completed. Oh, how he laughed and laughed. Until he didn’t.

3rd of First Seed 4E 189

I have settled well into my new role as Keeper. It is my duty to not only keep the Night Mother’s shrine clean, and the candles lit, but to tend to the body as well. The Night Mother’s crypt was a consecrated place—shroud-kissed, absent of sunlight, and safe from the world above. Removed from there, the remains are subject to the filth and corruption of the living. The body is perfectly preserved, so the concern is not physical, but rather spiritual—the remains must be sanctified.
regularly, so that they may continue to serve as a conduit for the Night Mother’s soul. Our Matron’s eternal spirit may travel the Void freely, but it is through her own earthly remains that she communicates with the Listener.

And so, I wash the corpse weekly with the requisite oils, recite the ancient incantations, and personally see to the extermination of any insects or rodents. If the Night Mother does not speak, it will be because she chooses not to—not because she is unable. This is my responsibility. This is my vow.

12th of Mid Year 4E 189

Months and months and months and no Listener. Why won’t the Night Mother speak to me? I am worthy as Keeper, but not as Listener? I protect our Lady, keep her sanctified, but she will not grace me with her voice?

4th of Sun’s Height 4E 189

So long since I have worked my blade. So long since I saved a soul. But I am now Keeper. No longer a Taker.

I think back fondly on my hours with the jester. His laughter, his screams, his pitiful cries. And then, as the end drew near, his laughter once more. Merry in death as well as life. I was honoured to know him.
Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for death, abandonment, loneliness, and madness.

Cicero's Journal - Volume 4

1st of Hearthfire 4E 189
Cheydinhal has erupted into violence and chaos, like so many other cities before it. The Sanctuary remains unbreached, but for how long? Our numbers are few, and with no Speaker, the contracts have almost to nothingness. Rasha’s hold on the sanctuary is slipping.

26th of Frostfall 4E 189
Silence! Deafening silence! In my head in my head in my head. It is the silence of death, the silence of the Void. Seeping into me, through the Mother. The silence is hatred. The silence is rage. The silence is love.

4th of Evening Star 4E 189
Today, Rasha declared himself Listener, claiming the Night Mother spoke to him at last. But when questioned, he could not name the Binding Words. Liar! Deceiver! His charade must not stand.

5th of Evening Star 4E 189
Rasha is dead.
As commanded by the silence, so did I obey. I did not wield the knife, oh no, but dipped the honey softly sweet, into Garnag’s eager ear. He is a good brother. A loyal brother. To both Cicero and our Matron. He did the deed, gladly.

10th of Sun’s Dawn 4E 190
Only three of us left. Cicero, Garnag, Pontius.

15th of Sun’s Dawn 4E 190
The Night Mother remains silent. I remain unworthy. The Sanctuary remains doomed.

3rd of First Seed 4E 190
I can hear it. Deeper, and deeper. Louder and louder, punctuating the silence like thunder on a calm evening. Laughter.

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**4th of First Seed 4E 190**

Laughing, laughing, laughing, laughing! It is the jester! A voice from the Void, to cheer poor Cicero! I accept your gift, dearest Night Mother. Thank you for my laughter. Thank you for my friend.

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**16th of Rain’s Hand 4E 191**

Pontius is dead. A Dark Brotherhood assassin was killed by a common bandit while walking the streets of Cheydinhal. How can something so sad be so funny?

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**17th of Rain’s Hand 4E 191**

I love the laughter, dearest Night Mother, but still I long to hear your voice. It’s not too late! Speak to me, my mother! Speak to me, that I may set things right! I can save the Sanctuary, I can save the Brotherhood!

You can have the laughter! Take it back! An exchange, then? The laughter for your voice?

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**2nd of Second Seed 4E 191**

It’s not safe to leave the Sanctuary. We’ll stay here. All is well.

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**29th of Last Seed 4E 191**

Garnag is gone. Gone gone gone gone gone. Left to get food, but he’ll be back. It’s only been three months. Three months. Tree months? Twelve moths? Four sloths!

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**21st of Sun’s Dusk 4E 192**

Cicero is dead! Cicero is born!

The laughter has filled me, filled me so very completely. I am the laughter. I am the jester. The soul that has served as my constant companion for so long has breached the veil of the Void finally and forever. It is now in me. It is now me.

The world has seen the last of Cicero the man. Behold Cicero, Fool of Hearts—laughter incarnate!

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**28th of Sun’s Dusk 4E 200**

Found the old journal, decided to write, a treatise on silence, sound, darkness and light!

How long has it been since the Night Mother first came here? How long since I was made Keeper? How long since I became the fool? Since I’ve been alone? Since Cheydinhal fell? Since they started pounding on the door, like so many hammered heartbeats?
It's dark in here, and quiet. Poor Cicero no longer hears the laughter, for he is the laughter. There is no Listener in Cheydinhal. No Listener in Cyrodiil. No Listener in me.

We must leave here. Before the Sanctuary falls. Before the Night Mother burns. Before the Dark Brotherhood withers. Before the laughter dies.

29th of Sun’s Dusk 4E 200

I took a stroll, and spied a maid, but Matron’s duty stayed my blade. So busy now, I miss the thrill, if only I had time to kill.
Cicero's Journal - Final Volume

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warning for madness.

Cicero’s Journal - Final Volume

30th of Sun’s Dusk 4E 200

I have written the letters. So polite. So official! To Astrid, in Skyrim. Her Sanctuary still stands. Still operates. But how? No Listener means no Black Sacrament, no Black Sacrament means no contracts. Her family can abandon the Old Ways, and still survive, still kill, but is that family still Brotherhood? Or something else? Something new. Something different. Something wrong?

Something wrong.

Still, we must go! Tomorrow, we set sail. Float on a boat through the moat called the sea her and me!

22nd Evening Star 4E 200

Sick sick sick of the tossing rolling throwing upon the grey grey waves!

I’ve been reading of Skyrim, of the good days, the old days, the Old Ways. There was another Sanctuary once. A Dawnstar Sanctuary. Good, ancient and strong. Blessed by Sithis. Cicero will go there! No need of Astrid!

The Mother and I will settle, and she will speak to me, finally, and we will build the Old Ways anew, together.

23rd of Evening Star 4E 200

The passphrase is mine! I have found it, in a letter ancient as the Sanctuary itself.

The Black Door will ask—“What is life’s greatest illusion?”

I am to answer—“Innocence, my brother.”

Finally, a space, a place, to call my own! A joker’s retreat for the Fool of Hearts!!!!

4th of First Seed 4E 201

The Sanctuary is home! As I had dared hoped! Cool and dark and lovely. My Sanctuary, Sanctuary from all.

I know it’s every corner, every hall, every shadowed nook and alcove. My Sanctuary. The
guardians know me, recognise me as Keeper. They leave poor Cicero alone. The big ugly beast—a different story. He’d eat me if he could, but to bind me, grind me, he’d need to find me. And Cicero will make sure that does not happen. For I have Sanctuary!

Sanctuary from all.

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13th of First Seed 4E 201

The Sanctuary is safety, and salvation. But silent, so silent. I give my love to the Unholy Matron. I give my laughter freely. But I do not hear her. The silence has returned. Now that I am laughter, and no longer hear laughter, I once again hear the silence. The silence of the Void. It reaches across Time and Space. Its silence is deafening, once more.

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1st of Rain’s Hand 4E 201

Mother and Keeper must go. I am not the Listener, and never will be. But I am the Keeper. I must serve my Mother’s will above my own. I must find her Listener. I must teach Astrid the error of her ways, the beauty and necessity of the Old Ways. I have sent the letter to Astrid. We leave soon. But Cicero will keep the Sanctuary as his Sanctuary!

A place to rest and ply my trade, for I once more take up the blade, and send some lucky souls to Him, when laughter strikes, as fits my whim!
The City of Stone

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

The City of Stone:
A Sellsword’s Guide to Markarth

by Armanda Alleia

If you’re cutting your coins across Skyrim, you’ll want to point your blade towards Markarth, the capital city of the Reach. There’s no end of trouble in the City of Stone, and that means plenty of ways for you to earn your supper. Your sellsword instincts should point you towards the wealthiest patrons with the fattest purses to work for, but you need to mind yourself during your rest hours.

Markarth isn’t like your Whiterun, where mercenary companies like the Companions make a sellsword an honoured profession. No, Markarth has its own rules, rules the natives aren’t just going to tell you. Lucky for you, old Ms. Alleia is here to shine the torchlight over your thick skulls.

First thing you’ll notice in the City of Stone is... the stone. They say dwarves cut out the city from the mountain, and maybe they did by the look of it. But what it really means is that the whole place is vertical, and the streets are really cliffs. Long story short, be careful when you’ve got a bellyful of mead.

When you enter the city proper, you’ll immediately hit the market. The merchants usually sell food and jewellery on the streets. Meat is the preferred ration, the craggy rocks in the area make for poor farming land, and silver is what’s used to make most all the rings and necklaces you might buy, thanks to the large silver mine in the city (we’ll get to that in a bit).

Whatever you do, don’t ask the Markarth city guard about anything. They’re about as helpful as an angry Frostbite Spider while you’re caught in its web, and if you mention anything about the Forsworn to them they might spit in your eye. Speaking of the Forsworn, these wildmen and women will be your main source of income while you’re in Markarth. The Jarl almost always has a bounty on some Forsworn leader or another, and if you don’t mind going blade-to-axe with someone two septims short of a pint of ale, it’s steady work.

The Silver-Blood Inn is where you want to head into after seeing the market. The drinks are, as usual, watered down (and judging by the metallic taste, with water from the rivers that run through the city’s smelter district). What’s important here is getting a room to stay in. You won’t find any friendly faces to con your way into a cheap place to stay in Markarth. The natives don’t trust strangers, so save yourself the trouble and put down your coin to rent a real room.

After you’ve spent a day recovering from travel, you’ll see the Markarth is divided in two sides by the big crag in the centre. The part with the big river running through it is called the Riverside, and the other is called the Dryside. The Riverside is where the smelter and native workers live, so don’t bother going there. Instead, head directly to Dryside and talk to the local Nord nobles and see what problems you can start solving (at the highest rate).
Two major places to see are the Temple of Dibella and Cidhna Mine. The temple rests on the top of the central crag. A good place to go if you’re on good terms with the Divines, but be warned, the Priestesses of Dibella don’t allow men into their Inner Sanctums, so don’t go crashing down in there uninvited unless you want a short trip to a long fall.

Cidhna Mine is the place where all the silver comes from that I mentioned before. But it’s also the jail. Markarth uses prisoners to mine the ore, and there’s a lot of it, so don’t get caught doing something illegal in the city or you’ll be hauled down there to dig. Apparently, the whole place is owned by one of the big families in the city, the Silver-Bloods (notice the inn is named after them? Always keep your sellsword eye open for hints like that). I tried meeting with the head of the Silver-Blood family to see if they had any work, but guarding their mines isn’t the blood-rush I became a mercenary for. Something to keep in mind for yourself if you’re planning on staying a few months.

The final place I’ll talk about here is Understone Keep, the home to the Jarl in Markarth. It’s a fancy palace like any other (assuming your palace is build underground), but what you need to know is the city underneath the keep. That’s right, there’s another city below Markarth. One of those old dwarven ruins. They sometimes have expeditions in the ruins that makes for a good job, guarding the scholars and maybe lifting a few stones here and there. If you’re lucky, you might come across one of those old dwarven machines, and you can bring back a souvenir after you’re done breaking it apart.

All right, Ms. Alleia’s hand is getting tired and that means this guide is done. Last piece of advice, don’t cause trouble in Markarth. Don’t start fights. Don’t stick your head anywhere without someone from the city paying you for it, because believe me, no one in Markarth wants you there. Make your gold, drink your mead, see what’s there to see, and move on. Nothing changes in the City of Stone, and that’s just fine.
Cleansing the Fane

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for demons and book burning.

The Chronicles of the Holy Brothers of Marukh IV

by Alessian Order

Or, The Cleansing of the Fane

Editor’s Note: This is the only surviving fragment of the chronicles of this First Era sect of the Alessian Order. It seems to have been kept at their great monastic complex at Lake Canulus, which was razed during the War of Righteousness (1E 2321) and its archives destroyed or dispersed.

Note also that Alessian scribes of this time customarily dated events from the Apotheosis of Alessia (1E 266)

Here is recorded the events of the Year 127 of the Blessed Alessia.

In this year was the day darkened over all lands, and the sun was all as it were Masser but three days old, and the stars about him at midday. This was on the fifth of First Seed. All who saw it were dismayed, and said that a great event should come hereafter. So it did, for that same year issued forth a great concourse of devils from the ancient Elvish temple Malada, such had not been seen since the days of King Belharza. These devils greatly afflicted the land such that no man could plow, or reap, or seed, and the people appealed to the brothers of Marukh for succour. And then Abbot Cosmas gathered all the brothers and led them to Malada, also known as the High Fane in the Elvish tongue, and came against it with holy fire, and the foul demons were destroyed, and many devilish relics and books found therein were burned. And the land had peace for many years.
The Code of Malacath

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

The Code of Malacath:
A Sellsword’s Guide to the Orc Strongholds

by Armanda Alleia

“No one bests an Orc.”

I don’t need you to guess how many times I’ve heard that boast in some dingy tavern or screamed at the top of the lungs by some fellow sellsword with too much fire in him. But I’d be lying if I said the Orc Strongholds don’t take those words as law. There are few places where Ms. Alleia would tell you that “tradition” and the “old ways” makes for a better fighter, but with Orcs it seems like staying true to your ancestors is the path to victory.

Let me start a few steps back. The Orc Strongholds have existed as long as the Orc race has, according to them. They’re armoured camps in the least, and fortresses at the most. Every man, woman, and child inside the walls is trained from birth to defend it. All their weapons and armour are smithed right there in the stronghold, all the food is hunted down by Orc warriors and brought back to be eaten by everyone who lives there.

They follow no laws, save their own, an unwritten set of rules called “The Code of Malacath,” named after one of their gods, who is sometimes called Mauloch. Most of its pretty simple, don’t steal, don’t kill, don’t attack people for no reason (although there seems to be a big list of exceptions). But Orcs in the stronghold don’t have jails for their criminals. They have Blood Price. You either pay enough in goods for your crimes, or you bleed enough that the victim is satisfied. And Orcs, I don’t need to tell you, have a lot of blood.

The Code also sets up who runs the stronghold. The toughest male is usually the Chief and makes decisions and decides when the Code of Malacath has been satisfied. All the women are either the Chief’s wives or his daughters, with the exception of the wise woman, who handles all spiritual matters and healing needs. Matters of grave dispute are handled with short but violent fights, and those who don’t get along with the Chief are usually forced out of the stronghold to live among the rest of us. An Orc grows up being told to fight for everything, that if something is not worth fighting for it is beneath the Code.

Orc Strongholds don’t like strangers, used to living on their own like they do. Ms. Alleia knows what she does because so many Orcs leave the strongholds to become sellswords or soldiers, and a few pints of mead gets them talking about home. I hear that sometimes an Orc will make a non-Orc a “Blood-Kin” and that person is then allowed to live in the stronghold as one of the clan, but I’ve never heard of that actually happening.

For all their strange rules and traditions, the Code of Malacath does breed a culture of determined warriors. They’re focused in ways that the average sellsword isn’t. They don’t hesitate to draw weapons and settle matters openly, and I think that’s the real difference between the stronghold
Orcs and city Orcs. Imperial Law allows you to settle fights through the Emperor’s men, but the
Code of Malacath demands you settle your problems yourself, a fine way of thinking if you’re
leading the mercenary’s life.
Confessions of a Khajiit Fur Trader

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for death and skinning.

Confessions of a Khajiit Fur Trader

by The Fur Trader

My execution is tomorrow. The turnkey asks what I’d like for my last meal.

Bring me paper, I say. A quill and a candle.

Perhaps the Jarl would like my confession. I would rather pass the time.

When my father’s harem burned down and our family fortune was lost to the ashes, my brother and I set to begging in the gutters of Elsweyr. I will never forget the first time we stole a traveller’s purse. It was almost by accident. Just a slip of the claw and the pouch fell into our hands. We ate like kings that night. We slept in a warm bed for the first time in months.

Soon after, my brother and I took up the knife. The gang we joined treated us as the dirty orphans we were. We robbed, we scammed, we cut and ran and years of debauchery and hard living took their toll. I lost half my left ear in a knife fight with a blind drunk Argonian.

I wanted to give up, but my brother, he dreamed bigger, better.

My brother wanted to make it to Cyrodiil and become legit merchants. We had a plan. Our final heist of a northbound caravan said to be filled with jewels.

Something went wrong. My brother could not stop the horses on time, and I stood helplessly by and watched the wagon plummet over a cliff. But as I picked through the wreckage, my devastation turned to excitement. There were no jewels, but there were plenty of luxurious wolf pelts, horker tusks and mammoth hides, more than enough to buy my way to Cyrodiil. I’d follow in the steps of so many of my kind. A travelling merchant, someone with a respectable profession.

I had all the furs bundled in my pack when I saw my brother’s broken body. His ears were still warm, and I shut his eyes for the last time. This was his dream. And he would want me to go. But what I wanted, well, the caravan guards were coming. I had to go, but I couldn’t just leave his body to rot.

My brother gave me my first skin. It was to be a memento. But in the darkness of the fence’s cabin, the coin hit my hand heavy. Then she looked at my brother’s pelt and offered three times the amount of any other fur. Disgust caught my throat, but it did not live very long. I realised the cost of such a forbidden luxury. The value, the demand, the respect.

This is what I wanted.

It became easier. A dark alley, a gag in one hand and a quick slice across the throat. Gently hold the body as it bleeds. I became faster, my cuts precise and fluid. I peel the skin with one motion
and kept the merchandise pristine, in one piece. I became rich. Far richer than anyone in my family had ever been. Yet I was careful. My stronghold was well-hidden, and practically impenetrable. I hired the men that used to employ me. We moved frequently on less travelled roads when we hunted in the wild. We stalked the back alleys we used to sleep in when we hunted in the city. I grew so rich that I no longer needed to dirty my own hands.

Patchwork coloured furs fetched the best price among the Bosmer. Argonians preferred the pelts completely skinned and tanned. Orcs prized the thick, waterproof leather of the Argonians. Humans most often bought tails and ears. I had to employ an alchemist and a master craftsman for a couple odd requests, but I didn’t ask questions when the gold piled up.

And now I’m a prisoner. Maybe I became careless. Maybe I let too many secrets slip between the sheets. The raid of my fortress was a massacre. They took me alive, barely. That was their mistake. My enemies should have killed me when they had the chance.

I have one lockpick. And the northern wall of my cell is weak from disrepair. My head shall not roll tomorrow.

I am not finished with the trade. There will always be buyers. Someday, I will sell my own skin for a king’s ransom, as my name is legend. And yours shall rot in the gutters with your bones.

- The Fur Trader
Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Cook’s Journal

Meat! Meat meat meat! That’s all they ever want!
I made them some nice grilled leeks and they threw them in my face!
I told them that if they’d bring me some fish or venison I’d cook it up, but all they ever do is waste their wages in the ring.
But maybe there is a way I can get them some meat.
Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

A Dance in Fire, v1

By Waughin Jarth

Scene: The Imperial City, Cyrodiil
Date: 7 Frost Fall, 3E 397

It seemed as if the palace had always housed the Atrius Building Commission, the company of clerks and estate agents who authored and notarised nearly every construction of any note in the Empire. It had stood for two hundred and fifty years, since the reign of the Emperor Magnus, a plain-fronted and austere hall on a minor but respectable plaza in the Imperial City. Energetic and ambitious middle-class lads and ladies worked there, as well as complacent middle-aged ones like Decumus Scotti. No one could imagine the world without the Commission, least of all Scotti. To be accurate, he could not imagine a world without herself in the Commission.

“Lord Atrius is perfectly aware of your contributions,” said the managing clerk, closing the shutter that demarcated Scotti’s office behind him. “But you know that things have been difficult.”

“Yes,” said Scotti, stiffly.

“Lord Vanech’s men have been giving us a lot of competition lately, and we must be more efficient if we are to survive. Unfortunately, that means releasing some of our historically best but presently underachieving senior clerks.”

“I understand. Can’t be helped.”

“I’m glad that you understand,” smiled the managing clerk, smiling thinly and withdrawing. “Please have your room cleared immediately.”

Scotti began the task of organising all his work to pass on to his successor. It would probably be young Imbrallius who would take most of it on, which was as it should be, he considered philosophically. The lad knew how to find business. Scotti wondered idly what the fellow would do with the contracts for the new statue of St Alessia for which the Temple of the One applied. Probably invent a clerical error, blame it on his old predecessor Decumus Scotti, and require an additional cost to rectify.

“I have correspondence for Decumus Scotti of the Atrius Building Commission.”

Scotti looked up. A fat-faced courier had entered his office and was thrusting forth a sealed scroll. He handed the boy a gold piece, and opened it up. By the poor penmanship, atrocious spelling and grammar, and overall unprofessional tone, it was manifestly evident who the writer was. Liodes Jurus, a fellow clerk some years before, who had left the Commission after being accused of unethical business practices.
“Dear Sckotti,

I emagine you always wondered what happened to me, and the last plase you would have expected to find me is out in the woods. But thats exactly where I am. Ha ha. If your’e smart and want to make a lot of extra gold for Lord Atrius (and yourself, ha ha), youll come down to Vallinwood too. If you have’nt or have been following the politics hear lately, you may or may not know that ther’s bin a war between the Boshmer and there neighbors Elswere over the past two years. Things have only just calm down, and ther’s a lot that needs to be rebuilt.

Now Ive got more business than I can handle, but I need someone with some clout, someone representing a respected agencie to get the quill in the ink. That someone is you, my fiend. Come & meat me at the M’ther Paskos Tavern in Falinnesti, Vallinwood. Ill be here 2 weeks and you wont be sorrie.

— Jurus

P.S.: Bring a wagonload of timber if you can.”

“What do you have there, Scotti?” asked a voice.

Scotti started. It was Imbrallius, his damnably handsome face peeking through the shutters, smiling in that way that melted the hearts of the stingiest of patrons and the roughest of stonemasons. Scotti shoved the letter in his jacket pocket.

“Personal correspondence,” he sniffed. “I’ll be cleared up here in just a moment.”

“I don’t want to hurry you,” said Imbrallius, grabbing a few sheets of blank contracts from Scotti’s desk. “I’ve just gone through a stack, and the junior scribes hands are all cramped up, so I thought you wouldn’t miss a few.”

The lad vanished. Scotti retrieved his letter and read it again. He thought about his life, something he rarely did. It seemed a sea of gray with a black insurmountable wall looming. There was only one narrow passage he could see in that wall. Quickly, before he had a moment to reconsider it, he grabbed a dozen of the blank contracts with the shimmering gold leaf ATRIUS BUILDING COMMISSION BY APPOINTMENT OF HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY and hid them in the satchel with his personal effects.

The next day he began his adventure with a giddy lack of hesitation. He arranged for a seat in a caravan bound for Valenwood, the single escorted conveyance to the southeast leaving the Imperial City that week. He had scarcely hours to pack, but he remembered to purchase a wagonload of timber.

“It will be extra gold to pay for a horse to pull that,” frowned the convoy head.

“So I anticipated,” smiled Scotti with his best Imbrallius grin.

Ten wagons in all set off that afternoon through the familiar Cyrodiilic countryside. Past fields of wildflowers, gently rolling woodlands, friendly hamlets. The clop of the horses’ hooves against the sound stone road reminded Scotti that the Atrius Building Commission constructed it. Five of the eighteen necessary contracts for its completion were drafted by his own hand.

“Very smart of you to bring that wood along,” said a grey-whiskered Breton man next to him on his wagon. “You must be in Commerce.”

“Of a sort,” said Scotti, in a way he hoped was mysterious, before introducing himself: “Decumus
“Gryf Mallon,” said the man. “I’m a poet, actually a translator of old Bosmer literature. I was researching some newly discovered tracts of the Mnoriad Pley Bar two years ago when the war broke out and I had to leave. You are no doubt familiar with the Mnoriad, if you’re aware of the Green Pact.”

Scotti thought the man might be speaking perfect gibberish, but he nodded his head.

“Naturally, I don’t pretend that the Mnoriad is as renowned as the Meh Ayleidion, or as ancient as the Danir Gol, but I think it has remarkable significance to understanding the nature of the merethic Bosmer mind. The origin of the Wood Elf aversion to cutting their own wood or eating any plant material at all, yet paradoxically their willingness to import plantstuff from other cultures, I feel can be linked to a passage in the Mnoriad,” Mallon shuffled through some of his papers, searching for the appropriate text.

To Scotti’s vast relief, the carriage soon stopped to camp for the night. They were high on a bluff over a grey stream, and before them was the great valley of Valenwood. Only the cry of seabirds declared the presence of the ocean to the bay to the west: here the timber was so tall and wide, twisting around itself like an impossible knot begun eons ago, to be impenetrable. A few more modest trees, only fifty feet to the lowest branches, stood on the cliff at the edge of the camp. The sight was so alien to Scotti and he found himself so anxious about the proposition of entering the wilderness that he could not imagine sleeping.

Fortunately, Mallon had supposed he had found another academic with a passion for the riddles of ancient cultures. Long into the night, he recited Bosmer verse in the original and in his own translation, sobbing and bellowing and whispering wherever appropriate. Gradually, Scotti began to feel drowsy, but a sudden crack of wood snapping made him sit straight up.

“What was that?”

Mallon smiled: “I liked it too. ‘Convocation in the malignity of the moonless speculum, a dance of fire—’”

“There are some enormous birds up in the trees moving around,” whispered Scotti, pointing in the direction of the dark shapes above.

“I wouldn’t worry about that,” said Mallon, irritated with his audience. “Now listen to how the poet characterises Hermaeus Mora’s invocation in the eighteenth stanza of the fourth book.”

The dark shapes in the trees where some of them perched like birds, others slithered like snakes, and still others stood up straight like men. As Mallon recited his verse, Scotti watched the figures softly leap from branch to branch, half-gliding across impossible distances for anything without wings. They gathered in groups and then reorganised until they had spread to every tree around the camp. Suddenly they plummeted from the heights.

“Mara!” cried Scotti. “They’re falling like rain!”

“Probably seed pods,” Mallon shrugged, not turning around. “Some of the trees have remarkable —”

The camp erupted in chaos. Fire burst out in the wagons, the horses wailed from mortal blows, casks of wine, fresh water, and liquor gushed their contents to the ground. A nimble shadow dashed past Scotti and Mallon, gathering sacks of grain and gold with impossible agility and grace. Scotti
only had one glimpse at it, lit up by a sudden burst of flame. It was a sleek creature with pointed ears, wide yellow eyes, mottled pied fur and a tail like a whip.

“Werewolf,” he whimpered, shrinking back.

“Cathay-raht,” groaned Mallon. “Much worse. Khajiti cousins or some such thing, come to plunder.”

“Are you sure?”

As quickly as they struck, the creatures retreated, diving off the bluff before the battlemage and knight, the caravan’s escorts, had fully opened their eyes. Mallon and Scotti ran to the precipice and saw a hundred feet below the tiny figures dash out of the water, shake themselves, and disappear into the wood.

“Werewolves aren’t acrobats like that,” said Mallon. “They were definitely Cathay-raht. Bastard thieves. Thank Stendarr they didn’t realise the value of my notebooks. It wasn’t a complete loss.”
It was a complete loss. The Cathay-raht had stolen or destroyed almost every item of value in the caravan in just a few minutes’ time. Decumus Scotti’s wagonload of wood he had hoped to trade with the Bosmer had been set on fire and then toppled off the bluff. His clothing and contracts were tattered and ground into the mud of dirt mixed with spilt wine. All the pilgrims, merchants, and adventurers in the group moaned and wept as they gathered the remnants of their belongings by the rising sun of the dawn.

“I best not tell anyone that I managed to hold onto my notes for my translation of the Mnoriad Pley Bar,” whispered the poet Gryf Mallon. “They’d probably turn on me.”

Scotti politely declined the opportunity of telling Mallon just how little value he himself placed on the man’s property. Instead, he counted the coins in his purse. Thirty-four gold pieces. Very little indeed for an entrepreneur beginning a new business.

“Hoy!” came a cry from the wood. A small party of Bosmer emerged from the thicket, clan in leather mail and bearing arms. “Friend or foe?”

“Neither,” growled the convoy head.

“You must be the Cyrodiils,” laughed the leader of the group, a tall skeleton-thin youth with a sharp vulpine face. “We heard you were en route. Evidently, so did our enemies.

“I thought the war was over,” muttered one of the caravan’s now ruined merchants.

The Bosmer laughed again: “No act of war. Just a little border enterprise. You are going on to Falinesti?”

“I’m not,” the convoy head shook his head. “As far as I’m concerned, my duty is done. No more horses, no more caravan. Just a fat profit loss for me.”

The men and women crowded around the man, protesting, threatening, begging, but he refused to step foot in Valenwood. If these were the new times of peace, he said, he’d rather come back for the next war.

Scotti tried a different route and approached the Bosmer. He spoke with an authoritative but friendly voice, the kind he used in negotiations with peevish carpenters: “I don’t suppose you’d consider escorting me to Falinesti. I’m a representative for an important agency, the Atrius Building Commission, here to help repair and alleviate some of the problems the war with the Khajiit brought to your province. Patriotism—”
“Twenty gold pieces, and you must carry your own gear if you have any left,” replied the Bosmer. Scotti reflected that negotiations with peevish carpenters rarely went his way either.

Six eager people had enough gold on them for payment. Among those without funds was the poet, who appealed to Scotti for assistance.

“I’m sorry, Gryf, I only have fourteen gold left over. Not even enough for a decent room when I get to Falinesti. I really would help you if I could,” said Scotti, persuading himself that it was true.

The band of six and their Bosmer escorts began the descent down a rocky path along the bluff. Within an hour’s time, they were deep in the jungles of Valenwood. A never-ending canopy of hues of brown and greens obscured the sky. A millennia’s worth of fallen leaves formed a deep, wormy sea of putrefaction beneath their feet. Several miles were crossed wading through the slime. For several more, they took a labyrinthian path across fallen branches and the low-hanging boughs of giant trees.

All the while, hour after hour, the inexhaustible host moved so fast, the Cyrodiils struggled to keep from being left behind. A red-faced little merchant with short legs took a bad step on a rotten branch and nearly fell. His fellow provincials helped him up. The Bosmer paused only a moment, their eyes continuously darting to the shadows in the trees above before moving on at their expeditious pace.

“What are they so nervous about?” wheezed the merchant irritably. “More Cathay-Raht?”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” laughed the Bosmer unconvincingly. “Khajiiti this far into Valenwood? In times of peace? They’d never dare.”

When the group passed high enough above the swamp that the smell was somewhat dissipated, Scotti felt a sudden pang of hunger. He was used to four meals a day in the Cyrodilic custom. Hours of nonstop exertion without food was not part of his regimen as a comfortably paid clerk. He pondered, feeling somewhat delirious, how long they had been trotting through the jungle. Twelve hours? Twenty? A week? Time was meaningless. Sunlight was only sporadic through the vegetative ceiling. Phosphorescent molds on the trees and in the much below provided the only regular illumination.

“Is it at all possible for us to rest and eat?” he hollered to his host up ahead.

“We’re near to Falinesti,” came the echoing reply. “Lots of food there.”

The path continued upward for several hours more across a clot of fallen logs, rising up to the first and then the second boughs of the tree line. As they rounded a long corner, the travellers found themselves midway up a waterfall that fell a hundred feet or more. No one had the energy to complains as they began pulling up the stacks of rock, agonising foot by foot. The Bosmer escorts disappeared into the mist, but Scotti kept climbing until there was no more rock left. He wiped the sweat and river water from his eyes.

Falinesti spread across the horizon before him. Sprawling across both banks of river stood the mighty graht-oak city, with groves and orchards of lesser trees crowding it like suppliants before their king. At a lesser scale, the tree that formed the moving city would have been extraordinary: gnarled and twisted with a gorgeous crown of gold and green, dripping with vines and shining with sap. At a mile tall and half as wide, it was the most magnificent thing Scotti had ever seen. If he had not been a starving man with the soul of a clerk, he would have sung.
“There you are,” said the leader of the escorts. “Not too far a walk. You should be glad it’s wintertide. In summertide, the city’s on the far south end of the province.”

Scotti was lost as to how to proceed. The sight of the vertical metropolis where people moved about like ants disoriented all his sensibilities.

“You wouldn’t know of an inn called,” he paused for a moment, and then pulled Jurus’s letter from his pocket. “Something like ‘Mother Paskos Tavern’?”

“Mother Pascost?” the lead Bosmer laughed his familiar contemptuous laugh. “You won’t want to stay there? Visitors always prefer the Aysia Hall in the top boughs. It’s expensive, but very nice.”

“I’m meeting someone at Mother Pascost’s Tavern.”

“If you’ve made up your mind to go, take a lift to Havel Slump and ask for directions there. Just don’t get lost and fall asleep in the western cross.”

This apparently struck the youth’s friends as a very witty jest, and so it was with their laughter echoing behind him that Scotti crossed the writhing root system to the base of Falinesti. The ground was littered with leaves and refuse, and from moment to moment a glass or a bone would plummet from far above, so he walked with his neck crooked to have warning. An intricate network of platforms anchored to thick vines slipped up and down the slick trunk of the city with perfect grace, manned by operators with arms as thick as an ox’s belly. Scotti approaches the nearest fellow at one of the platforms, who was idly smoking from a glass pipe.

“I was wondering if you might take me to Havel Slump.”

The mer nodded and within a few minutes time, Scotti was two hundred feet in the air at a crook between two mighty branches. Curled webs of moss stretched unevenly across the fork, forming a sharing roof for several dozen small buildings. There were only a few souls in the alley, but around the bend ahead, he could hear the sound of music and people. Scotti tipped the Falinesti Platform Ferryman a gold piece and asked for the location of Mother Pascost’s Tavern.

“Straight ahead of you, sir, but you won’t find anyone there,” the Ferryman explained, pointing in the direction of the noise. “Morndas everyone in Havel Slump has revelry.”

Scotti walked carefully along the narrow street. Though the ground felt as solid as the marble avenues of the Imperial City, there were slick cracks in the bark that exposed fatal drops into the river. He took a moment to sit down, to rest and get used to the view from the heights. It was a beautiful day to be certain, but it took Scotti only a few minutes of contemplation to rise up in alarm. A jolly little raft anchored down stream below him had distinctly moved several inches while he watched it. But it hadn’t moved at all. He had. Together with everything around him. It was no metaphor: the city of Falinesti walked. And, considering its size, it moved quickly.

Scotti rose to his feet and into a cloud of smoke that drifted out from around the bend. It was the most delicious roast he had ever smelled. The clerk forgot his fear and ran.

The “revelry” as the Ferryman had termed it took place on an enormous platform tied to the tree, wide enough to be a plaza in any other city. A fantastic assortment of the most amazing people Scotti had ever seen were jammed shoulder-to-shoulder together, many eating, many more drinking, and some dancing to a lutist and singer perched on an offshoot above the crowd. They were largely Bosmer, true natives clad in colourful leather and bones, with a close minority of orcs. Whirling through the throng, dancing and bellowing at one another were a hideous ape people. A few heads bobbing over the tops of the crowd belonged not, as Scotti first assumed, to very tall
people, but to a family of centaurs.

“Care for some mutton?” queried a wizened old mer who roasted an enormous beast on some red-hot rocks.

Scotti quickly paid him a gold piece and devoured the leg he was given. And then another gold piece and another leg. The fellow chuckled when Scotti began choking on a piece of gristle, and handed him a mug of a frothing white drink. He drank it and felt a quiver run through his body as if he were being tickled.

“What is that?” Scotti asked.

“Jagga. Fermented pig’s milk. I can let you have a flagon of it and a bit more mutton for another gold.”

Scotti agreed, paid, gobbled down the meat, and took the flagon with him as he slipped into the crowd. His co-worker Liodes Jurus, the man who had told him to come to Valenwood, was nowhere to be seen. When the flagon was a quarter empty, Scotti stopped looking for Jurus. When it was half empty, he was dancing with the group, oblivious to the broken planks and gaps in the fencework. At three quarters empty, he was trading jokes with a group of creatures whose language was completely alien to him. By the time the flagon was completely drained, he was asleep, snoring, while the revelry continued on all around his supine body.

The next morning, still asleep, Scotti had the sensation of someone kissing him. He made a face to return the favour, but a pain like fire spread through his chest and forced him to open his eyes. There was an insect the size of a large calf sitting on him, crushing him, its spiky legs holding him down while the central spiral-bladed vortex of a mouth tore through his shirt. He screamed and thrashed but the beast was too strong. It had found its meal and it was going to finish it.

It’s over, Scotti thought wildly, I should have never left home. I could have stayed in the City, and perhaps found work with Lord Vanech. I could have begun again as a junior clerk and worked my way back up.

Suddenly the mouth released itself. The creature shivered once, expelled a burst of yellow bile, and died.

“Got one!” cried a voice, not too distantly.

For a moment, Scotti lay still. His head throbbed and his chest burned. Out of the corner of his eye he saw movement. Another of the horrible monsters was scurried towards him. He scrambled, trying to push himself free, but before he could come out, there was a sound of a bow cracking and an arrow pierced the second insect.

“Good shot!” cried another voice. “Get the first one again! I just saw it move a little!”

This time, Scotti felt the impact of the bolt hit the carcass. He cried out, but he could hear how muffled his voice was by the beetle’s body. Cautiously, he tried sliding a foot out and rolling under, but the movement apparently had the effect of convincing the archers that the creature still lived. A volley of arrows as launched forth. Now the beast was sufficiently perforated so pools of its blood, and likely the blood of its victims, began to seep out onto Scotti’s body.

When Scotti was a lad, before he grew too sophisticated for such sports, he had often gone to the Imperial Arena for the competitions of war. He recalled a great veteran of the fights, when asked, telling him his secret, “Whenever I’m in doubt of what to do, and I have a shield, I stay behind it.”
Scotti followed that advice. After an hour, when he no longer heard arrows being fired, he threw aside the remains of the bug and leapt as quickly as he could to a stand. It was not a moment too soon. A gang of eight archers had their bows pointing his direction, ready to fire. When they saw him, they laughed.

“Didn’t anyone ever tell you not to sleep in the western cross? How’re we supposed to exterminate all the hoarvors if you drunks keep feeding ‘em?”

Scotti shook his head and walked back along the platform, round the bend, to Havel Slump. He was bloodied and torn and tired and he had far too much fermented pig’s milk. All he wanted was a proper place to lie down. He stepped into Mother Pascost’s Tavern, a dank place, wet with sap, smelling of mildew.

“My name is Decumus Scotti,” he said. “I was hoping you have someone named Jurus staying here.”

“Decumus Scotti?” pondered the fleshy proprietress, Mother Pascost herself. “I’ve heard that name. Oh, you must be the fellow he left the note for. Let me go see if I can find it.”
A Dance in Fire, v3

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Mentions of rape, pirating, and fire.

A Dance in Fire, v3

by Waughin Jarth

Mother Pascost disappeared into the sordid hole that was her tavern, and emerged a moment later with a scrap of paper with Liodes Jurus’s familiar scrawl. Decumus Scotti held it up before a patch of sunlight that had found its way through the massive boughs of the tree city, and read.

Sckotti,

So you made it to Falinnesti, Vallinwood! Congradulatens! Im sure you had quit a adventure getting here. Unfortunately, Im not here anymore as you probably guess. Theres a town down rivver called Athie Im at. Git a bote and join me! Its ideal! I hope you brot a lot of contracks, cause these people need a lot of building done. They wer close to the war, you see, but not close enough they don’t have any money left to pay. Ha ha. Meat me down here as son as you can.

— Jurus

So, Scotti pondered, Jurus had left Falinesti and gone to some place called Athie. Given his poor penmanship and ghastly spelling, it could equally well be Athy, Aphy, Othry, Imthri, or Krakamaka. The sensible thing to do, Scotti knew, was to call this adventure over and try to find some way to get back to the Imperial City. He was no mercenary devoted to a life of thrills: he was, or at least had been, a senior clerk at a successful private building commission. Over the last few weeks, he had been robbed by the Cathay-Raht, taken on a death march through the jungle by a gang of giggling Bosmer, half-starved to death, drugged with fermented pig’s milk, nearly slain by some kind of giant tick, and attacked by archers. He was filthy, exhausted, and had, he counted, ten gold pieces to his name. Now the man whose proposal brought him to the depths of misery was not even here. It was both judicious and seemly to abandon the enterprise entirely.

And yet, a small but distinct voice in his head told him: You have been chosen. You have no other choice but to see this through.

Scotti turned to the stout old woman, Mother Pascost, who had been watching him curiously: “I was wondering if you knew of a village that was at the edge of the recent conflict with Elsweyr. It’s called something like Ath-ie?”

“You must mean Athay,” she grinned. “My middle lad, Viglil, he manages a dairy down there. Beautiful country, right on the river. Is that where your friend went?”

“Yes,” said Scotti. “Do you know the fastest way to get there?”

After a short conversation, an even shorter ride to Falinesti’s roots by way of the platforms, and a jog to the river bank, Scotti was negotiating transport with a huge fair-haired Bosmer with a face
like a picked carp. He called himself Captain Balfix, but even Scotti with his sheltered life could recognise him for what he was. A retired pirate for hire, a smuggler for certain, and probably much worse. His ship, which had clearly been stolen in the distant past, was a bent old Imperial sloop.

“Fifty gold and we’ll be in Athay in two days time,” boomed Captain Balfix expansively.

“I have ten, no, sorry, nine gold pieces,” replied Scotti, and felt the need for explanation, added, “I had ten, but I gave one to the Platform Ferryman to get me down here.”

“Nine is just as fine,” said the captain agreeably. “Truth be told, I was going to Athay whether you paid me or not. Make yourself comfortable on the boat, we’ll be leaving in just a few minutes.”

Decumus Scotti boarded the vessel, which sat low in the water of the river, stacked high with crates and sacks that spilled out of the hold and galley and onto the deck. Each was marked with stamps advertising the most innocuous substances: copper scraps, lard, ink, High Rock meal (marked “For Cattle”), tar, fish jelly. Scotti’s imagination reeled picturing what sorts of illicit imports were truly aboard.

It took more than those few minutes for Captain Balfix to haul in the rest of his cargo, but in an hour, the anchor was up and they were sailing downriver towards Athay. The green gray water barely rippled, only touched by the fingers of the breeze. Lush plant life crowded the banks, obscuring rom sight all the animals that sang and roared at one another. Lulled by the serene surroundings, Scotti drifted to sleep.

At night, he awoke and gratefully accepted some clean clothes and food from Captain Balfix.

“Why are you going to Athay, if I may ask?” queried the Bosmer.

“I’m meeting a fellow colleague there. He asked me to come down from the Imperial City where I worked for the Atrius Building Commission to negotiate some contracts,” Scotti took another bite of the dried sausage they were sharing for dinner. “We’re going to try to repair and refurbish whatever bridges, roads, and other structures that got damaged in the recent war with the Khajiit.”

“It’s been a hard two years,” the captain nodded his head. “Though I suppose good for me and the likes of you and your friend. Trade routes cut off. Now they think there’s going to be war with the Summerset Isles, you heard that?”

Scotti shook his head.

I’ve done my share of smuggling skooma down the coast, even helping some revolutionary types escape the Mane’s wrath, but now the wars’ve made me a legitimate trader, a business-man. The first casualties of war is always the corrupted.”

Scotti said he was sorry to hear that, and they lapsed into silence, watching the stars moons’ reflection on the still water. The next day, Scotti awoke to find the captain wrapped up in his sail, torpid from alcohol, singing in a low, slurred voice. When he saw Scotti rise, he offered his flagon of jagga.

“I learned my lesson during revelry at western cross.”

The captain laughed, then burst into tears, “I don’t want to be legitimate. Other pirates I used to know are still raping and stealing and smuggling and selling nice folk like you into slavery. I swear to you, I never thought the first time that I ran a real shipment of legal goods that my life would turn out like this. Oh, I know, I could go back to it, bu Baan Dar knows not after all I’ve seen. I’m a ruined man.”
Scotti helped the weeping mer out of the sail, murmuring words of reassurance. Then he added, “Forgive me for changing the subject, but where are we?”

“Oh,” moaned Captain Balfix miserably. “We made good time. Athay’s right around the bend in the river.”

“Then it looks like Athay’s on fire,” said Scotti, pointing.

A great plume of smoke black as pitch was rising above the trees. As they drifted around the bend, they next saw the flames, and then the blackened skeletal remains of the village. Dying, blazing villagers leapt from rocks into the river. A cacophony of wailing met their ears, and they could see, roaming along the edges of the town, the figures of Khajiiti soldiers bearing torches.

“Baan Dar bless me!” slurred the captain. “The war’s back on!”

“Oh, no,” whimpered Scotti.

The sloop drifted with the current toward the opposite shore away from the fiery town. Scotti turned his attention there, and the sanctuary it offered. Just a peaceful arbour, away from the horror. There was a shudder of leaves in two of the trees and a dozen lithe Khajiit dropped to the ground, armed with bows.

“They see us,” hissed Scotti. “And they’ve got bows!”

“Well, of course they have bows,” snarled Captain Balfix. “We Bosmer may have invented the bloody things, but we didn’t think to keep them secret, you bloody bureaucrat.”

“Now, they’re setting their arrows on fire!”

“Yes, they do that sometimes.”

“Captain, they’re shooting at us! They’re shooting at us with flaming arrows!”

“Ah, so they are,” the captain agreed. “The aim here is to avoid being hit.”

But hit they were, and very shortly thereafter. Even worse, the second volley of arrows hit the supply of pitch, which ignited in a tremendous blue blaze. Scotti grabbed Captain Balfix and they leapt overboard just before the ship and all its cargo disintegrated. The shock of the cold water brought the Bosmer into temporary sobriety. He called to Scotti, who was already swimming as fast as he could toward the bend.

“Master Decumus, where do you think you’re swimming to?”

“Back to Falinesti!” cried Scotti.

“It will take you days, and by the time you get there, everyone will know about the attack on Athay! They’ll never let anyone they don’t know in! The closest village downriver is Grenos, maybe they’ll give us shelter!”

Scotti swam back to the captain and side-by-side they began paddling in the middle of the river, past the burning residuum of the village. He thanked Mara that he had learned to swim. Many a Cyrodiil did not, as largely land-locked as the Imperial Province was. Had he been raised in Mir Corrup or Artemon, he might have been doomed, but the Imperial City itself was encircled by water, and every lad and lass there knew how to cross without a boat. Even those who grew up to be clerks and not adventurers.
Captain Balfix’s sobriety faded as he grew used to the water’s temperature. Even in wintertide, the Xylo River was fairly temperate and after a fashion, even comfortable. The Bosmer’s strokes were uneven, and he’d stray closer to Scotti and then further away, pushing ahead and then falling behind.

Scotti looked to the shore to his right: the flames had caught the trees like tinder. Behind them, was an inferno, with which they were barely keeping pace. To the shore on their left, all looked fair, until he saw a tremble in the river-reeds, and then what caused it. A pride of the largest cats he had ever seen. They were auburn-haired, green-eyed beasts with jaws and teeth to match his wildest nightmares. And they were watching the two swimmers, and keeping pace.

“Captain Balfix, we can’t go to either that shore or the other one, or we’ll be parboiled or eaten,” Scotti whispered. “Try to even your kicking and strokes. Breathe like you would normally. If you’re feeling tired, tell me, and we’ll float on our backs for a while.”

Anyone who has had the experience of giving rational advice to a drunkard would understand the hopelessness. Scotti kept pace with the captain, slowing himself, quickening, drifting left and right, while the Bosmer moaned old ditties from his pirate days. When he wasn’t watching his companion, he watched the cats on the shore. After a stretch, he turned to his right. Another village had caught fire. Undoubtedly, it was Grenos. Scotti stared at the blazing fury, awed by the sight of the destruction, and did not hear that the captain had ceased to sing.

When he turned back, Captain Balfix was gone.

Scotti dove into the murky depths of the river over and over again. There was nothing to be done. When he resurfaced after his final search, he saw that the giant cats had moved on, perhaps assuming that he too had drowned. He continued his lonely swim downriver. A tributary, he noted, had formed a final barrier, keeping the flames from spreading further. But there were no more towns. After several hours, he began to ponder the wisdom of going ashore. Which shore was the question.

He was spared the decision. Ahead of him was a rocky island with a bonfire. He did not know if he were intruding on a party of Bosmeri or Khajiiti, only that he could swim no more. With straining, aching muscles, he pulled himself onto the rocks.

They were Bosmer refugees he gathered, even before they told him. Roasting over the fire was the remains of one of the giant cats that had been stalking him through the jungle on the opposite shore.

“Senche-Tiger,” said one of the young warriors ravenously. “It’s no animal—it’s as smart as the Cathay-Raht or Ohmes or any other bleeding Khajiiti. Pity this one drowned. I would have gladly killed it. You’ll like the meat though. Sweet, from all the sugar these asses eat.”

Scotti did not know if he was capable of eating a creature as intelligent as a man or mer, but he surprised himself, as he had done several times over the last days. It was rich, succulent, and sweet, like sugared pork, but no seasonings had been added. He surveyed the crowd as he ate. A sad lot, some still weeping for lost family members. They were the survivors of both the villages of Grenos and Athay, and war was on every person’s lips. Why had the Khajiiti attacked again? Why—specifically directed at Scotti, as a Cyrodiil—why was the Emperor not enforcing peace in his provinces?

“I was to meet another Cyrodiil,” he said to a Bosmer maiden who he understood to be from Athay. “His name was Liodes Jurus. I don’t suppose you know what might have happened to him.”
“I don’t know your friend, but there were many Cyrodiils in Athay when the fire came,” said the girl. “Some of them, I think, left quickly. They were going to Vindisi, inland, in the jungle. I am going there tomorrow, so are many of us. If you wish, you may come as well.”

Decumus Scotti nodded solemnly. He made himself as comfortable as he could in the stony ground of the river island, and somehow, after much effort, he fell asleep. But he did not sleep well.
Eighteen Bosmeri and one Cyrodiilic former senior clerk for an Imperial building commission trudged through the jungle westward from the Xylo River to the ancient village of Vindisi. For Decumus Scotti, the jungle was hostile, unfamiliar ground. The enormous vermiculated trees filled the bright morning with darkness, and resembled nothing so much as grasping claws, bent on impending their progress. Even the fonds of the low plants quivered with malevolent energy. What was worse, he was not alone in his anxiety. His fellow travellers, the natives who had survived the Khajiit attacks on the villages of Grenos and Athay, wore faces of undisguised fear.

There was something sentient in the jungle, and not merely the mad but benevolent indigenous spirits. In his peripheral vision, Scotti could see the shadows of the Khajiiti following the refugees, leaping from tree to tree. When he turned to face them, the lithe forms vanished into the gloom as if they had never been there. But he knew he had seen them. And the Bosmeri saw them too, and quickened their pace.

After eighteen hours, bitten raw by insects, scratched by a thousand thorns, they emerged into a valley clearing. It was night, but a row of blazing torches greeted them, illuminating the leather-wrought tents and jumbled stones of the hamlet of Vindisi. At the end of the valley, the torches marked a sacred site, a gnarled bower of trees pressed closed together to form a temple. Wordlessly, the Bosmeri walked the torch arcade toward the trees. Scotti followed them. When they reached the solid mass of living wood with only one gaping portal, Scotti could see a dim blue light glowing within. A low sonorous moan from a hundred voices echoed within. The Bosmeri maiden he had been following held out her hand, stopping him.

“You do not understand, but no outsider, not even a friend may enter,” she said. “This is a holy place.”

Scotti nodded, and watched the refugee march into the temple, heads bowed. Their voices joined with the ones within. When the last wood elf had gone inside, Scotti turned his attention back to the village. There must be food to be had somewhere. A tendril of smoke and a faint whiff of roasting venison beyond the torchlight led him.

There were five Cyrodiils, two Bretons, and a Nord, the group gathered around a campfire of glowing white stones, pulling steaming strips of meat from the cadaver of a great stag. At Scotti’s approach, they rose up, all but the Nord who was distracted by his hunk of animal flesh.

“Good evening, sorry to interrupt, but I was wondering if I might have a little something to eat. I’m afraid I’m rather hungry, after walking all day with some refugees from Grenos and Athay.”

They bade him to sit down and eat, and introduced themselves.
“So the war’s back on, it seems,” said Scotti amiably.

“Best thing for these effete do-nothings,” replied the Nord in between bites. “I’ve never seen such a lazy culture. Now they’ve got the Khajiiti striking them on land, and the high elves at sea. If there’s any province that deserves a little distress, it’s damnable Valenwood.”

“I don’t see how they’re so offensive to you,” laughed one of the Bretons.

“They’re congenital thieves, even worse than the Khajiiti because they are so blessed meek in their aggression,” the Nord spat out a gob of fat which sizzled on the hot stones of the fire. “They spread their forests into territory that doesn’t belong to them, slowly infiltrating their neighbours, and they’re puzzled when Elsweyr shoves back at them. They’re all villains of the worst order.”

“What are you doing here?” asked Scotti.

“I’m a diplomat from the court of Jehenna,” muttered the Nord, returning to his food.

“What about you, what are you doing here?” asked one of the Cyrodiils.

“I work for Lord Atrius building commission in the Imperial City,” said Scotti. “One of my former colleagues suggested that I come down to Valenwood. He said the war was over, and I could contract a great deal of business for my firm rebuilding what was lost. One disaster after another, and I’ve lost all my money, I’m in the middle of a rekindling war, and I cannot find my former colleague.”

“Your former colleague,” murmured another of the Cyrodiils, who had introduced himself as Reglius. “He wasn’t by any chance named Liodes Jurus, was he?”

“You know him?”

“He lured me down to Valenwood in nearly the exact same circumstances,” smiled Reglius, grimly. “I worked for your employer’s competitor, Lord Vanech’s men, where Liodes Jurus also formerly worked. He wrote to me, asking that I represent an Imperial building commission and contract some post-war construction. I had just been released from my employment, and I thought that if I brought some new business, I could have my job back. Jurus and I met in Athay, and he said he was going to arrange a very lucrative meeting with the Silvenar.”

Scotti was stunned: “Where is he now?”

“I’m no theologian, so I couldn’t say,” Reglius shrugged. “He’s dead. When the Khajiiti attacked Athay, they began by torching the harbour where Jurus was readying his boat. Or, I should say, my boat since it was purchased with the gold I brought. By the time we were even aware of what was happening enough to flee, everything by the water was ash. The Khajiiti may be animals, but they know how to arrange an attack.”

“I think they followed us through the jungle to Vindisi,” said Scotti nervously. “There were definitely a group of something jumping along the treetops.”

“Probably one of the monkey folk,” snorted the Nord. “Nothing to be concerned about.”

“When we first came to Vindisi and the Bosmeri all entered that tree, they were furious, whispering something about unleashing an ancient terror on their enemies,” the Breton shivered, remembering. “They’ve been there ever since, for over a day and a half now. If you want something to be afraid of, that’s the direction to look.”
The other Breton, who was a representative of the Daggerfall Mages Guild, was staring off into the darkness while his fellow provincial spoke. “Maybe. But there’s something in the jungle too, right on the edge of the village, looking in.”

“More refugees maybe?” asked Scotti, trying to keep the alarm out his voice.

“Not unless they’re travelling through the trees now,” whispered the wizard. The Nord and the one of the Cyrodiil grabbed a long tarp of wet leather and pulled it across the fire, instantly extinguishing it without so much as a sizzle. Now Scotti could see the intruders, their elliptical eyes and long cruel blades catching the torchlight. He froze with fear, praying that he too was not so visible to them.

He felt something bump against his back, and gasped.

Reglius’ voice hissed from up above: “Be quiet for Mara’s sake and climb up here.”

Scotti grabbed hold of the knotted double-vine that hung down from a tall tree at the edge of the dead campfire. He scrambled up it as quickly as he could, holding his breath lest any grunt of exertion escaped him. At the top of the vine, high above the village, was an abandoned nest from some great bird in a trident-shaped branch. As soon as Scotti had pulled himself into the soft, fragrant straw, Reglius pulled up the vine. No one else was there, and when Scotti looked down, he could see no one below. No one, that is except the Khajiiti, slowly moving toward the glow of the temple tree.

“Thank you,” whispered Scotti, deeply touched that a competitor had helped him. He turned away from the village, and saw that the tree’s upper branches brushed against the mossy rock walls that surrounded the valley below. “How are you at climbing?”

“You’re mad,” said Reglius under his breath. “We should stay here until they leave.”

“If they burn Vindisi like they did Athay and Grenos, we’ll be dead sure as if we were on the ground,” Scotti began the slow careful climb up the tree, testing each branch. “Can you see what they’re doing?”

“I can’t really tell,” Reglius stared down into the gloom. “They’re at the front of the temple. I think they also have… it looks like long ropes, trailing off behind them, off into the pass.”

Scotti crawled onto the strongest branch that pointed toward the wet, rocky face of the cliff. It was not a far jump at all. So close, in fact, that he could smell the moisture and feel the coolness of the stone. But it was a jump nevertheless, and in his history as a clerk, he had never before leapt from a tree a hundred feet off the ground to the sheer rock. He pictured in his mind’s eye the shadows that had pursued him through the jungle from the heights above. How their legs coiled to spring, how their arms snapped forward in an elegant fluid motion to grasp. He leapt.

His hands grappled for rock, but long thick cords of moss were more accessible. He held hard, but when he tried to plant his feet forward, they slipped up skyward. For a few seconds, he found himself upside down before he managed to pull himself into a more conventional position. There was a narrow outcropping jutting out of the cliff where he could stand and finally exhale.

“Reglius. Reglius. Reglius,” Scotti did not dare to call out. In a minute, there was a shaking of branches, and Lord Vanech’s man emerged. First his satchel, then his head, then the rest of him. Scotti started to whisper something, but Reglius shook his head violently and pointed downward. One of the Khajiiti was at the base of the tree, peering at the remains of the campfire.
Reglius awkwardly tried to balance himself on the branch, but as strong as it was it was exceedingly difficult with only one free hand. Scotti cupped his palms and then pointed at his satchel. It seemed to pain Reglius to let it out of his grasp, but he relented and tossed it to Scotti.

There was a small, almost invisible hole in the bag, and when Scotti caught it, a single gold coin dropped out. It rang as it bounced against the rock wall on the descent, a high soft sound that seemed like the loudest alarm Scotti had ever heard.

Then many things happened very quickly.

The Cathay-Raht at the base of the tree looked up and gave a loud wail. The other Khajiiti followed in chorus, as the cat below crouched down and then sprung up into the lower branches. Reglius saw it below him, climbing up with impossible dexterity, and panicked. Even before he jumped, Scotti could tell that he was going to fall. With a cry, Reglius the Clerk plunged to the ground, breaking his neck on impact.

A flash of white fire erupted from every crevice of the temple, and the moan of the Bosmeri prayer changed into something terrible and otherworldly. The climbing Cathay-Raht stopped and stared.


It was as if a crack in reality had opened wide. A flood of horrific beats, tentacled toads, insects of armour and spine, gelatinous serpents, vapporous beings with the face of gods, all poured forth from the great hollow tree, blind with fury. They tore the Khajiiti in front of the temple to pieces. All the other cats fled for the jungle, but as they did so, they began pulling on the ropes they carried. In a few seconds time, the entire village of Vindisi was boiling with the lunatic apparitions of the Wild Hunt.

Over the babbling, barking, howling horde, Scotti heard the Cyrodiils in hiding cry out as they were devoured. The Nord too was found and eating, and both Bretons. The wizard had turned himself invisible, but the swarm did not rely on their sight. The tree the Cathay-Raht was in began to sway and rock from the impossible violence beneath it. Scotti looked at the Khajiiti’s fear-struck eyes, and held out one of the cords of moss.

The cat’s face showed its pitiful gratitude as it leapt for the vine. It didn’t have time to entirely replace the expression when Scotti pulled back the cord, and watched it fall. The Hunt consumed it to the bone before it struck the ground.

Scotti’s own jump up to the next outcropping of rock was immeasurably more successful. From there, he pulled himself to the top of the cliff and was able to to look down into the chaos that had been the village of Vindisi. The Hunt’s mass had grown and began to spill out through the pass out of the valley, pursuing the fleeing Khajiit. It was then that the madness truly began.

In the moon’s light, from Scotti’s vantage, he could see where the Khajiit had attached their ropes. With a thunderous boom, an avalanche of boulders poured over the pass. When the dust cleared, he saw that the valley had been sealed. The Wild Hunt had nowhere to turn but on itself.

Scotti turned his head, unable to bear to look at the cannibalistic orgy. The night jungle stood before him, a web of wood. He slung Reglius’s satchel over his shoulder, and entered.
“Soap! The forest will eat love! Straight ahead! Stupid and a stupid cow!”

The voice boomed out so suddenly that Decumus Scotti jumped. He stared off into the dim jungle glade from which he only heard animal and insect calls, and the low whistling of wind moments before. It was a queer, oddly accented voice of indiscriminate gender, tremulous in its modulations, but unmistakably human. Or, at the very least, elven. An isolated Bosmer perhaps with a poor grasp of the Cyrodilic language. After countless hours of plodding through the dense knot of Valenwood jungle, any voice of slight familiarity sounded wondrous.

“Hello?” he cried.

“Beetles on any names? Certainly yesterday yes!” the voice called back. “Who, what, and when, and mice!”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand,” replied Scotti, turning toward the brambled tree, thick as a wagon, where the voice had issued. “But you needn’t be afraid of me. My name is Decumus Scotti. I’m a Cyrodiil from the Imperial City. I came here to help rebuild Valenwood after the war, you see, and now I’m rather lost.”

“Gemstones and grilled slaves… The war,” moaned the voice and broke down into sobs.

“You know about the war? I wasn’t sure, I wasn’t even sure how far away from the border I am now,” Scotti began slowly walking toward the tree. He dropped Reglius’s satchel to the ground, and held out his empty hands. “I’m unarmed. I only want to know the way to the closest town. I’m trying to meet my friend, Liodes Jurus, in Silvenar.”

“Silvenar!” the voice laughed. It laughed even louder as Scotti circled the tree. “Worms and wine! Worms and wine! Silvenar sings for worms and wine!”

There was nothing to be found anywhere around the tree. “I don’t see you. Why are you hiding?”

In frustration born of hunger and exhaustion, he struck the tree trunk. A sudden shiver of gold and red erupted from a hollow nook above, and Scotti was surrounded by six winged creatures scarcely more than a few inches long. Bright crimson eyes were set on either side of the tunnel-like protuberances, the animals’ always open mouths. They were legless, and their thin, rapidly beating, aureate wings seemed poorly constructed to transport their fat, swollen bellies. And yet, they darted through the air like sparks from a fire. Whirling about the poor clerk, they began chattering what he now understood to be perfect nonsense.

“Wines and worms, how far from the border I am! Academic garnishments, and alas, Liodes
Jurus!"

“Hello, I’m afraid I’m unarmed? Smoken flames and the closest town is near Oblivion.”

“Swollen on bad meat, an indigo nimbus, but you needn’t be afraid of me!”

“Why are you hiding? Why are you hiding? Before I begin to friend, love me, Lady Zuleika!”

Furious with the mimics, Scotti swung his arms, driving them up into the treetops. He stomped back to the clearing and opened up the satchel again, as he had done some hours before. There was still, unsurprisingly, nothing useful in the bag, and nothing to eat in any corner or pocket. A godly amount of gold (he smiled grimly, as he had done before, at the irony of being financially solvent in the jungle), a stack of neat blank contracts from Lord Vanech’s building commission, some thin cord, and an oiled leather cloak for bad weather. At least, Scotti considered, he had not suffered rain.

A rolling moan of thunder reminded Scotti of what he had suspected for some weeks now. He was cursed.

Within an hour’s time, he was wearing the cloak and clawing his way through the mud. The trees, which had earlier allowed no sunlight in, provided no shelter against the pounding storm and wind. The only sounds that pierced the pelting of the rain were the mocking calls of the flying creatures, flitting just above, babbling their nonsense. Scotti bellowed at them, threw rocks, by they seemed enamoured of his company.

While he was reaching to grab a promising looking stone to hurl at his tormentors, Scotti felt something shift beneath his feet. Wet but solid ground suddenly liquified and became a rolling tide, rushing him forward. Light as a leaf, he flew head over feet over head, until the mudflow dropped and he continued forward, plunging down into a river twenty-five feet below.

The storm passed quite as instantly as it had arrived. The sun melted the dark clouds and warmed Scotti as he swam for the shore. There, another sign of the Khajiiti incursion into Valenwood greeted him. A small fishing village had stood there once, so recently extinct that it smouldered like a still-warm corpse. Dirt cairns that had once housed fish by the smell of them had been ravaged, their bounty turned to ash. Rafts and skiffs lay broken, scuttled, half-submerged. All the villagers were no more, either dead or refugees far away. Or so he presumed. Something banged against the wall of one of the ruins. Scotti ran to investigate.

“My name is Decumus Scotti?” sang the first winged beast. “I’m a Cyrodiil from? The Imperial City? I came here to help rebuild Valenwood after the war, you see, and now I’m rather lost?”

“I swell to maculate, apeneck!” agreed one of its companions. “I don’t see you. Why are you hiding?”

As they fell into chattering, Scotti began to search the rest of the village. Surely the cats had left something behind, a scrap of dried meat, a morsel of fish sausage, anything. But they had been immaculate in their complete annihilation. There was nothing to eat anywhere. Scotti did find one item of possible use under the tumbled remains of a stone hut. A bow and two arrows made of bone. The string had been lost, likely burned away in the heat of the fire, but he pulled the cord from Reglius’s satchel and restrung it.

The creatures flew over and hovered nearby as he worked: “The convent of the sacred Liodes Jurus?”
“You know about the war! Worms and wine, circumscribe a golden host, apeneck!”

The moment the cord was taut, Scotti nocked an arrow and swung around, pulling the string tight against his chest. The winged beasts, having an experience with archers before, shot off in all directions in a blur. They needn’t have bothered. Scotti’s first arrow dove into the ground three feet in front of him. He swore and retrieved it. The mimics, having likewise had experience with poor archers before, returned at once to hovering nearby and mocking Scotti.

On his second shot, Scotti did much better, in purely technical terms. He remembered how the archers in Falinesti looked when he pulled himself out from under the hoarvor tick, and they were all taking aim at him. He extended his left hand, right hand, and right elbow in a symmetrical line, drawing the bow so his hand touched his jawline, and he could see the creature in his sight like the arrow was a finger he was pointing with. The bolt missed the target by only two feet, but it continued on its trajectory, snapping when it struck on a rock wall.

Scotti walked to the river’s edge. He had only one arrow left, and perhaps, he considered, it would be most practical to find a slow-moving fish and fire it on that. If he missed, at least there was less of a chance of breaking the shaft, and he could always retrieve it from the water. A rather torpid, whiskered dish rolled by, and he took aim at it.

“My name is Decumus Scotti!” one of the creatures howled, frightening the fish away. “Stupid and a stupid cow! Will you dance a dance in fire!”

Scotti turned and aimed the arrow as he had done before. This time, however, he remembered to plant his feet as the archers had done, seven inches apart, knees straight, left leg slightly forward to meet the angle of his right shoulder. He released the last arrow.

The arrow also proved a serviceable prong for roasting the creature against the smoking hot stones of one of the ruins. Its other companions had disappeared instantly after the beast was slain, and Scotti was able to dine in peace. The meat proved to be delicious, if scarcely more than a first course. He was picking the last of it from the bones, when a boat sailed into view from around the bend of the river. At the helm were Bosmer sailors. Scotti ran to the bank and waved his arms.

“You bloody, callous bastards!” Scotti howled. “Knaves! Hooligans! Apenecks! Scoundrels!”

A grey-whiskered form came out from a hatch, and Scotti immediately recognised him as Gryf Mallon, the poet translator he had met in the caravan from Cyrodiil.

He peered Scotti’s direction, and his eyes lit up with delight, “Decumus Scotti! Precisely the man I hoped to see! I want to get your thoughts on a rather puzzling passage in the Mnoriad Pley Bar! It begins ‘I went weeping into the world, searching for wonders,’ perhaps you’re familiar with it?”

“I’d like nothing better than to discuss the Mnoriad Pley Bar with you, Gryf!” Scotti called back. “Would you let me come aboard though first.”

Overjoyed at being on a ship bound for any port at all, Scotti was true to his word. For over an hour as the boat rolled down the river past the blackened remnants of Bosmeri villages, he asked no questions and spoke nothing of his life over the past weeks: he merely listened to Mallon’s theories of merethic Aldmeri esoterica. The translator was undemanding of his guest’s scholarship, accepting nods and shrugs as civilised conversation. He even produced some wine and fish jelly, which he shared with Scotti absent-mindedly, as he expounded on his various these.

Finally, while Mallon was searching for a reference to some minor point in his notes, Scotti asked,
“Rather off subject, but I was wondering where we’re bound.”

“The very heart of the province, Silvenar,” Mallon said, not looking up from the passage he was reading. “It’s somewhat bothersome, actually, as I wanted to go to Woodhearth first to talk to a Bosmer there who claims to have an original copy of Dirith Yalmillhiad, if you can believe it. But for the time being, that has to wait. Summerset Isle has surrounded the city, and is in the process of starving the citizenry until they surrender. It’s a tiresome prospect, since the Bosmeri are happy to eat one another, so there’s a risk that at the end, only one fat wood elf will remain to wave the flag.”

“That is vexing,” agreed Scotti, sympathetically. “To the east, the Khajiiti are burning everything, and to the west, the Altmer are waging war. I don’t suppose the borders to the north are clear?”

“They’re even worse,” replied Mallon, finger on the page, still distracted. “The Cyrodiils and Redguards don’t want Bosmer refugees streaming into their provinces. It only stands to reason. Imagine how much more criminally inclined they’d be now that they’re homeless and hungry.”

“So,” murmured Scotti, feeling a shiver. “We’re trapped in Valenwood.”

“Not at all. I need to leave fairly shortly myself, as my publisher has set a very definite deadline for my new book of translations. From what I understand, one merely petitions to the Silvenar for special border protection and one can cross into Cyrodiil with impunity.”

“Petition the Silvenar, or petition at Silvenar?”

“Petition the Silvenar at Silvenar. It’s an odd nomenclature that is typical of this place, the sort of thing that makes my job as a translator that much more challenging. The Silvenar, he, or rather they are the closest the Bosmeri have to a great leader. The essential thing to remember about the Silvenar—” Mallon smiled, finding the passage he was looking for, “Here! ‘A fortnight, inexplicable, the world burns into a dance.’ There’s that metaphor again.”

“What were you saying about the Silvenar?” asked Scotti. “The essential thing to remember?”

“I don’t remember what I was saying,” replied Mallon, turning back to his oration.

In a week’s time, the little boat bumped along the shallow, calmer waters of the foaming current the Xylo had become, and Decumus Scotti first saw the city of Silvenar. If Falinesti was a tree, then Silvenar was a flower. A magnificent pile of faded shades of green, red, blue, and white, shining with crystalline residue. Mallon had mentioned off-hand, when not otherwise explaining Aldmeri prosody, that Silvenar had once been a blossoming glade in the forest, but owing to some spell or natural cause, the trees’ sap began flowing with translucent liquor. The process of the sap flowing and hardening over the colourful trees had formed the web of the city. Mallon’s description was intriguing, but it hardly prepared him for the city’s beauty.

“What is the finest, most luxurious tavern here?” Scotti asked one of the Bosmer boatmen.

“Prithala Hall,” Mallon answered. “But why don’t you stay with me? I’m visiting an acquaintance of mine, a scholar I think you’ll find fascinating. His hovel isn’t much, but he has the most extraordinary ideas about the principles of a Merethic Aldmeri tribe the Sarmathi—”

“Under any other circumstances, I would happily accept,” said Scotti graciously. “But after weeks of sleeping on the ground or on a raft, and eating whatever I could scrounge, I feel the need for some indulgent creature comforts. And then, after a day or two, I’ll petition the Silvenar for safe passage to Cyrodiil.”
The men bade each other goodbye. Gryf Mallon gave him the address of his publisher in the Imperial City, which Scotti accepted and quickly forgot. The clerk wandered the streets of Silvenar, crossing bridges of amber, admiring the petrified forest architecture. In front of a particularly estimate palace of silvery reflective crystal, he found Prithala Hall.

He took the finest room, and ordered a gluttonous meal of the finest quality. At a nearby table, he saw two very fat fellows, a man and a Bosmer, remarking how much finer the food was there than at the Silvenar’s palace. They began to discuss the war and some issues of finances and rebuilding the provincial bridges. The man noticed Scotti looking at them, and his eyes flashed with recognition.

“Scotti, is that you? Kynareth, where have you been? I’ve had to make all the contacts here on my own!”

At the sound of his voice, Scotti recognised him. The fat man was Liodes Jurus, vastly engorged.
Decumus Scotti sat down, listening to Liodes Jurus. The clerk could hardly believe how fat his former colleague at Lord Atrius’s Building Commission had become. The piquant aroma of the roasted meat dish before Scotti melted away. All the other sounds and textures of Prithala Hall vanished all around him, as if nothing else existed but the vast form of Jurus. Scotti did not consider himself an emotional man, but he felt a tide flow over him at the sight of the man whose badly written letters had been the guideposts that carried him from the Imperial City back in early Frost Fall.

“Where have you been?” Jurus demanded again. “I told you to meet me in Falinesti weeks ago.”

“I was there weeks ago,” Scotti stammered, too surprised to be indignant. “I got your note to meet you in Athay, and so I went there, but the Khajiiti had burned it to the ground. Somehow, I found my way with refugees in another village, and someone there told me that you had been killed.”

“And you believed that right away?” Jurus sneered.

“The fellow seemed very well-informed about you. He was a clerk from Lord Vanech’s Building Commission named Reglius, and he said that you had also suggested that he come down to Valenwood to profit from the war.”

“Oh, yes,” said Jurus, after thinking a moment. “I recall the name now. Well, it’s good for business to have two commissions here. We just need to coordinate our bids, and all should be well.”

“Reglius is dead,” said Scotti. “But I have his contracts from Lord Vanech’s Commission.”

“Even better,” gasped Jurus, impressed. “I never knew you were such a ruthless competitor, Decumus Scotti. Yes, this could certainly improve our position with the Silvenar. Have I introduced you to Basth here?”

Scotti had only been dimly aware of the Bosmer’s presence at the table with Jurus, which was surprising given that the mer’s girth nearly equalled his dining companion. The clerk nodded to Basth coldly, still numb and confused. It had not left his mind that only an hour earlier, Scotti had intended to petition the Silvenar for safe passage through the border back to Cyrodiil. The thought of doing business with Jurus after all, of profiting from Valenwood’s war with Elsweyr, and now the second one with Summerset Isle, seemed like something happening to another person.

“Your colleague and I were talking about the Silvenar,” said Basth, putting down the leg of mutton he had been gnawing on. “I don’t suppose you’ve heard about his nature?”

“A little, but nothing specific. I got the impression that he’s very important and very peculiar.”
“He’s the representative of the People, legally, physically, and emotionally,” explained Jurus, a little annoyed at his new parter’s lack of common knowledge. “When they’re healthy, so is he. When they’re mostly female, so is he. When they cry for food or trade or an absence of foreign interference, he feels it too, and makes laws accordingly. In a way, he’s a despot, but he’s the people’s despot.”

“That sounds,” said Scotti, searching for the appropriate word. “Like… bunk.”

“Perhaps it is,” shrugged Basth. “But he has many rights as the Voice of the People, including the granting of foreign building and trade contracts. It’s not important whether you believe us. Just think of the Silvenar as being like one of your mad Emperors, like Pelagius. The problem facing us now is that since Valenwood is being attacked on all sides, the Silvenar’s aspect is now one of distrust and fear of foreigners. The one hope of his people, and thus of the Silvenar himself, is that the Emperor will intervene and stop the war.”

“Will he?” asked Scotti.

“You know as well as we do that the Emperor has not been himself lately,” Jurus helped himself to Reglius’s satchel and pulled out the blank contracts. “Who knows what he’ll choose to do or not do? That reality is not our concern, but these blessings from the late sir Reglius make our job much simpler.”

They discussed how they would represent themselves to the Silvenar into the evening. Scotti ate continuously, but not nearly so much as Jurus and Basth. When the sun began to rise in the hills, its light reddening through the crystal walls of the tavern, Jurus and Basth left to their rooms at the palace, granted to them diplomatically in lieu of an actual immediate audience with the Silvenar. Scotti went to his room. He thought about staying up a little longer to ruminate over Jurus’s plans and see what might be the flaw in them, but upon touching the cool, soft bed, he immediately fell asleep.

The next afternoon, Scotti awoke, feeling himself again. In other words, timid. For several weeks now, he had been a creature bent on mere survival. He had been driven to exhaustion, attacked by several jungle beasts, starved, nearly drowned, and forced into discussions of ancient Aldmeri poetical works. The discussion he had with Jurus and Basth about how to dupe the Silvenar into signing their contracts seemed perfectly reasonable then. Scotti dressed himself in his old battered clothes and went downstairs in search of food and a peaceful place to think.

“You’re up,” cried Basth upon seeing him. “We should go to the palace now.”

“Now?” whined Scotti. “Look at me. I need new clothes. This isn’t the way one should dress to pay a call on a prostitute, let alone the Voice of the People of Valenwood. I haven’t even bathed.”

“You must cease from this moment forward being a clerk, and become the student of mercantile trade,” said Liodes Jurus grandly, taking Scotti by the arm and leading him into the sunlit boulevard outside. “The first rule is to recognise what you represent to the prospective client, and what angle best suits you. You cannot dazzle him with opulent fashion and professional bearing, my dear boy, and it would be fatal if you attempted to. Trust me on this. Several others besides Basth and I are guests at the palace, and they have made the error of appearing too eager, too formal, too ready for business. They will never be granted audience with the Silvenar, but we have remained aloof ever since the initial rejection. I’ve dallied about the court, spread my knowledge of life in the Imperial City, had my ears pierced, attended promenades, eaten and drunk of all that was given to me. I dare say I’ve put on a pound or two. The message we’ve sent is clear: it is in his, not our, best interest to meet.”
“Our plan worked,” added Basth. “When I told his minister that our Imperial representative had arrived, and that we were at last willing to meet with the Silvenar this morning, we were told to bring you there straightaway.”

“Aren’t we late then?” asked Scotti.

“Very,” laughed Jurus. “But that’s again part of the angle we’re representing. Benevolent disinterest. Remember not to confuse the Silvenar with conventional nobility. His is the mind of the common people. When you grasp that, you’ll understand how to manipulate him.”

Jurus spent the last several minutes of the walk through the city expounding on his theories about what Valenwood needed, how much, and at what price. They were staggering figures, far more construction and far higher costs than anything Scotti had been used to dealing with. He listened carefully. All around then, the city of Silvenar revealed itself, glass and flower, roaring winds and beautiful inertia. When they reached the palace of the Silvenar, Decumus Scotti stopped, stunned. Jurus looked at him for a moment and then laughed.

“It’s quite bizarre, isn’t it?”

That it was. A frozen scarlet burst of twisted, uneven spires as if a rival sun rising. A blossom the size of a village, where courtiers and servants resembled nothing so much as insects walked about it sucking its ichor. Entering over a bent petal-like bridge, the three walked through the palace of unbalanced walls. Where the partitions bent close together and touched, there was a shaded hall or a small chamber. Where they warped away from one another, there was a courtyard. There were no doors anywhere, no way to get to the Silvenar but by crossing through the entire spiral of the palace, through meetings and bedrooms and dining halls, past dignitaries, consorts, musicians, and many guards.

“It’s an interesting place,” said Basth. “But not very much privacy. Of course, that suits the Silvenar well.”

When they reached the inner corridors, two hours after they first entered the palace, guards, brandishing blades and bows, stopped them.

“We have an audience with the Silvenar,” said Jurus, patiently. “This is Lord Decumus Scotti, the Imperial representative.”

One of the guards disappeared down the winding corridor, and returned moments later with a tall, proud Bosmer clad in a loose robe of patchwork leather. He was the Minister of trade: “The Silvenar wishes to speak with Lord Decumus Scotti alone.”

It was not the place to argue or show fear, so Scotti stepped forward, not even looking toward Jurus and Basth. He was certain they were showing their masks of benevolent indifference. Following the Minister into the audience chamber, Scotti recited to himself the facts and figures Jurus had presented him with. He willed himself to remember the Angle and the Image he must project.

The audience chamber of the Silvenar was an enormous dome where the walls bent from bowl-shaped at the base inward to almost meet at the top. A thin ray of sunlight streamed through the fissure hundreds of feet above, and directly upon the Silvenar, who stood upon a puff of shimmering grey powder. For all the wonder of the city and the palace, the Silvenar himself looked perfectly ordinary. An average, blandly handsome, slightly tired-looking, extraordinary Wood Elf of the type one might see in any capital in the Empire. It was only when he stepped from the dais that Scotti noticed an eccentricity to his appearance. He was very short.
“I had to speak to you alone,” said the Silvenar in a voice common and unrefined. “May I see your papers?”

Scotti handed him the blank contracts from Lord Vanech’s Building Commission. The Silvenar studied them, running his fingers over the embossed seal of the Emperor, before handing them back. He suddenly seemed shy, looking to the floor. “There are many charlatans at my court who wish to benefit from the wars. I thought you and your colleagues were among them, but those contracts are genuine.”

“Yes, they are,” said Scotti calmly. The Silvenar’s conventional aspect made it easy for Scotti to speak, with no formal greetings, no deference, exactly as Jurus had instructed: “It seems most sensible to begin straightforward talking about the roads which need to be rebuilt, and then the harbours that the Altmeri have destroyed, and then I can give you my estimates on the cost of resupplying and renovating the trade routes.”

“Why hasn’t the Emperor seen fit to send a representative when the war with Elsweyr began, two years ago?” asked the Silvenar glumly.

Scotti thought a moment before replying of all the common Bosmeri he had met in Valenwood. The greedy, frightened mercenaries who had escorted him from the border. The hard-drinking revellers and expert pest exterminating archers in the Western Cross of Falinesti. Nosy old Mother Pascost in Havel Slump. Captain Balfix, the poor sadly reformed pirate. The terrified but hopeful refugees of Athay and Grenos. The mad, murderous, self-devouring Wild Hunt of Vindisi. The silent, dour boatmen hired by Gryf Mallon. The degenerate, grasping Basth. If one creature represented their total disposition, and that many more throughout the province, what would be his personality? Scotti was a clerk by occupation and nature, instinctively comfortable cataloging and filing, making things fit in a system. If the soul of Valenwood were to be filed, where would it be put?

The answer came upon him almost before he posed himself the question. Denial.

“I’m afraid that question doesn’t interest me,” said Scotti. “Now, can we get back to the business at hand?”

All afternoon, Scotti and the Silvenar discussed the pressing needs of Valenwood. Every contract was filled and signed. So much was required and there were so many costs associated with it that addendums and codicils had to be scribbled into the margins of the papers, and those had to be resigned. Scotti maintained his benevolent indifference, but he found that dealing with the Silvenar was not quite the same as dealing with a simple, sullen child. The Voice of the People knew certain practical, everyday things as well: the yields of fish, the benefits of trade, the condition of every township and forest in his province.

“We will have a banquet tomorrow night to celebrate this commission,” said the Silvenar at last.

“Best make it tonight,” replied Scotti. “We should leave for Cyrodiil with the contracts tomorrow, so I’ll need a safe passage to the border. We best not waste any more time.”

“Agreed,” said the Silvenar, and called for his Minister of Trade to put his seal on the contracts and arrange for the feast.

Scotti left the chamber, and was greeted by Basth and Jurus. Their faces showed the strain of maintaining the illusion of unconcern for too many hours. As soon as they were out of sight of the guards, they begged Scotti to tell them all. When he showed them the contract, Basth began weeping with delight.
“Anything about the Silvenar that surprised you?” asked Jurus.

“I hadn’t expected him to be half my height.”

“Was he?” Jurus looked mildly surprised. “He must have shrunk since I tried to have an audience with him earlier. Maybe there is something to all that nonsense about him being affected by the plight of his people.”
Scene: Silvenar, Valenwood
Date: 13 Sun’s Dusk, 3E 397

The banquet at the palace of the Silvenar was well attended by every bureaucrat and trader who had attempted to contract the rebuilding of Valenwood. They looked on Decumus Scotti, Liodes Jurus, and Basth with undisguised hatred. It made Scotti very uncomfortable, but Jurus delighted in it. As the servants brought in platter after platter of roasted meats, Jurus poured himself a cup of Jagga and toasted the clerk.

“I can confess it now,” said Jurus. “I had grave doubts about inviting you to join me on this adventure. All the other clerks and agents of building commissions I contacted were more outwardly aggressive, but none of them made it through, let alone to the audience chamber of the Silvenar, let alone brokered the deals on their own like you did. Come, have a cup of Jagga with me.”

“No thank you,” said Scotti. “I had too much of that drug in Falinesti, and nearly got sucked dry by a giant tick because of it. I’ll find something else to drink.”

Scotti wandered about the hall until he saw some diplomats drinking mugs of steaming brown liquid, poured from a large silver urn. He asked them if it was tea.

“Tea made from leaves?” scoffed the first diplomat. “Not in Valenwood. This is Rotmeth.”

Scotti poured himself a mug and took a tentative sip. It was gamy, bitter and sugared, and very salty. At first it seemed very disagreeable to his palate, but a moment later he found he had drained the mug and was pouring another. His body tingled. All the sounds in the chamber seemed oddly disjointed, but not frighteningly so.

“So you’re the fellow who got the Silvenar to sign all those contracts,” said the second diplomat. “That must have required some deep negotiations.”

“Not at all, not at all, just a little basic understanding of mercantile trading,” grinned Scotti, pouring himself a third mug of Rotmeth. “The Silvenar was very eager to involve the Imperial state with the affairs of Valenwood. I was very eager to take a percentage of the commission. With all that blessed eagerness, it was merely a matter of putting quill to contract, bless you.”

“You have been in the employ of the his Imperial Majesty very long?” asked the first diplomat.
“It’s a bite, or rather, a bit more complicated than that in the Imperial City. Between you and me, I don’t really have a job. I used to work for Lord Atrius and his Building Commission, but I got sacked. And then, the contracts are from Lord Vanech and his Building Commission, ’cause I got them from this fellow Reglius who is a competitor but still a very fine fellow until he was made dead by those Khajiiti,” Scotti drained his fifth mug. “When I go back to the Imperial City, then the real negotiations can begin, bless you. I can go to my old employer and Lord Vanech, and say, look here you, which one of you want these commissions? And they’ll fall over each other to take them from me. It will be a bidding war for my percentage the likes of which no one nowhere has never seen.”

“So you’re not a representative of his Imperial Majesty, the Emperor?” asked the first diplomat.

“Didn’t you hear what I said? You stupid?” Scotti felt a surge of rage, which quickly subsided. He chuckled, and poured himself a seventh mug. “The Building Commissions are privately owned, but they’re still representatives of the Emperor. So I’m a representative of the Emperor. Or I will be. When I get these contracts in. It’s very complicated. I can understand why you’re not following me. Bless you, it’s all like the poet said, a dance in fire, if you follow the illusion, that is to say, allusion.”

“And your colleagues? Are they representatives of the Emperor?” asked the second diplomat.

Scotti burst into laughter, shaking his head. The diplomats bade him their respects and went to talk to the Minister. Scotti stumbled out of the palace, and reeled through the strange, organic avenues and boulevards of the city. It took him several hours to find his way to Prithala Hall and his room. Once there, he slept, very nearly on his bed.

The next morning, he woke to Jurus and Basth in his room, shaking him. He felt half-asleep and unable to open his eyes fully, but otherwise fine. The conversation with the diplomats floated in his mind in a haze, like an obscure childhood memory.

“What in Mara’s name is Rotmeth?” he asked quickly.

“Rancid, strongly fermented meat juices with lots of spices to kill the poisons,” smiled Basth. “I should have warned you to stay with Jagga.”

“You must understand the Meat Mandate by now,” laughed Jurus. “These Bosmeri would rather eat each other than touch the fruit of the vine or the field.”

“What did I say to those diplomats?” cried Scotti, panicking.

“Nothing bad apparently,” said Jurus, pulling out some papers. “Your escorts are downstairs to bring you to the Imperial Province. Here are your papers of safe passage. The Silvenar seems very impatient about business proceeding forward rapidly. He promises to send you some sort of rare treasure when the contracts are fulfilled. See, he’s already given me something.”

Jurus showed off his new, bejewelled earring, a beautiful large faceted ruby. Basth showed that he had a similar one. The two fat fellows left the room so Scotti could dress and pack.

A full regiment of the Silvenar’s guards was on the street in front of the tavern. They surrounded a carriage crested with the official arms of Valenwood. Still dazed, Scotti climbed in, and the captain of the guard gave the signal. They began a quick gallop. Scotti shook himself, and then peered behind. Basth and Jurus were waving him goodbye.

“Wait!” Scotti cried. “Aren’t you coming back to the Imperial Province too?”
“The Silvenar asked that we stay behind as Imperial representatives!” yelled Liodes Jurus. “In case there’s a need for more contracts and negotiations! He’s appointed us Undrape, some sort of special honour for foreigners at court! Don’t worry! Lots of banquets to attend! You can handle the negotiations with Vanech and Atrius yourself and we’ll keep things settled here!”

Jurus continued to yell advice about business, but his voice became indistinct with distance. Soon it disappeared altogether as the convoy rounded the streets of Silvenar. The jungle loomed suddenly and then they were in it. Scotti had only gone through it by foot or along the rivers by slow-moving boats. Now it flashed all around him in profusions of greens. The horses seemed even faster moving through the underbrush than on the smooth paths of the city. None of the weird sounds or dank smells of the jungle penetrated the escort. It felt to Scotti as if he were watching a play about the jungle with the background of a quick moving scrim, which offered only the merest suggestion of place.

So it went for two weeks. There was lots of food and water in the carriage with the clerk, so he merely ate and slept as the caravan passed endlessly on. From time to time, he’d hear the sound of blades clashing, but when he looked around whatever had attacked the caravan had long since left behind. At last, they reached the border, where an Imperial garrison was stationed.

Scotti presented the soldiers who met the carriage with the papers. They asked him a barrage of questions that he answered monosyllabically, and then let him pass. It took several more days to arrive at the gates of the Imperial City. The horses that had flown so fast through the jungle now slowed down in the unfamiliar territory of the wooded Colovian Estates. By contrast, the cries of his province’s birds and smells of his province’s plant life brought Decumus Scotti alive. It was if he had been dreaming all the past months.

At the gates of the Imperial City, Scotti’s carriage door was opened for him and he stepped out on uncertain legs. Before he had a moment to say something to the escort, they had vanished, galloping back south through the forest. The first thing he did now that he was home was go to the closest tavern and have tea and fruit and bread. If he never ate meat again, he told himself, that would suit him very nicely.

Negotiations with Lord Atrius and Lord Vanech proceeded immediately thereafter. It was most agreeable. Both commissions recognised how lucrative the rebuilding of Valenwood would be for their agency. Lord Vanech claimed, quite justifiably, that as the contracts had been written on forms notarised by his commission, he had the legal right to them. Lord Atrius claimed that Decumus Scotti was his agent and representative, and that he had never been released from employment. The Emperor was called to arbitrate, but he claimed to be unavailable. His advisor, the Imperial Battlemage Jagar Tharn, had disappeared long ago and could not be called on for his wisdom and impartial mediation.

Scotti lived very comfortably off the bribes from Lord Atrius and Lord Vanech. Every week, a letter would arrive from Jurus or Basth asking about the status of the negotiations. Gradually, these letters ceased coming, and more urgent ones came from the Minister of Trade and the Silvenar himself. The War of the Blue Divide with Summerset Isle ended with the Altmeri winning several new coastal islands from the Wood Elves. The war with Elsweyr continued, ravaging the eastern borders of Valenwood. Still, Vanech and Atrius fought over who would help.

One fine morning in the early spring of the year 3E 398, a courier arrived at Decumus Scotti’s door.

“Lord Vanech has won the Valenwood commission, and requests that you and the contracts come to his hall at your earliest convenience.”
“Has Lord Atrius decided not to challenge further?” asked Scotti.

“He’s been unable to, having died very suddenly, just now, from a terribly unfortunate accident,” said the courier.

Scotti had wondered how long it would be before the Dark Brotherhood was brought in for final negotiations. As he walked toward Lord Vanech’s Building Commission, a long, severe piece of architecture on a minor but respectable plaza, he wondered if he had played the game, as he ought to have. Could Vanech be so rapacious as to offer him a lower percentage of the commission now that his chief competitor was dead? Thankfully, he discovered, Lord Vanech had already decided to pay Scotti what he had proposed during the heat of the winter negotiations. His advisors had explained to him that other, lesser building commissions might come forward unless the matter were handled quickly and fairly.

“Glad we have all the legal issues done with,” said Lord Vanech, fondly. “Now we can get to the business of helping the poor Bosmeri, and collecting the profits. It’s a pity you weren’t our representative for all the troubles with Bend’r-mahk and the Arnesian business. But there will be plenty more wars, I’m sure of that.”

Scotti and Lord Vanech sent word to the Silvenar that at last they were prepared to honour the contracts. A few weeks later, they had a banquet in honour of the profitable enterprise. Decumus Scotti was the darling of the Imperial City, and no expense was spared to make it an unforgettable evening.

As Scotti met the nobles and wealthy merchants who would be benefitting from his business dealings, an exotic but somehow faintly familiar smell rose in the ballroom. He traced it to its source: a thick roasted slab of meat, so long and thick it covered several platters. The Cyrodilic revellers were eating it ravenously, unable to find the words to express their delight at its taste and texture.

“It’s like nothing I’ve ever had before!”

“It’s like pig-fed venison!”

“Do you see the marbling of fat and meat? It’s a masterpiece!”

Scotti went to take a slice, but then he saw something imbedded deep in the dried and rendered roast. He nearly collided with his new employer Lord Vanech as he stumbled back.

“Where did this come from?” Scotti stammered.

“From our client, the Silvenar,” beamed his lordship. “It’s some kind of local delicacy they called Unthrappa.”

Scotti vomited, and didn’t stop for some time. It cast rather a temporary pall on the evening, but when Decumus Scotti was carried off to his manor house, the guests continued to dine. The Unthrappa was the delight of all. Even more so when Lord Vanech himself took a slice and found the first of two rubies buried within. How very clever of the Bosmer to invent such a dish, the Cyrodilics agreed.
In Morrowind, both worshippers and sorcerers summon lesser Daedra and bound Daedra as servants and instruments.

Most Daedric servants can be summoned by sorcerers only for very brief periods, within the most fragile and tenuous frameworks of command and binding. This fortunately limits their capacity for mischief, though in only a few minutes, most of these servants can do terrible harm to their summoners as well as their enemies.

Worshippers may bind other Daedric servants to this plane through rituals and pacts. Such arrangements result in the Daedric servant remaining on this plane indefinitely—or at least until their bodily manifestations on this plane are destroyed, precipitating their supernatural essences back to Oblivion. Whenever Daedra are encountered at Daedric ruins or in tombs, they are almost invariably long-term visitors to our plane.

Likewise, lesser entities bound by their Daedra Lords into weapons and armour may be summoned for brief periods, or may persist indefinitely, so long as they are not destroyed and banished. The class of bound weapons and bound armours summoned by Temple followers and conjurers are examples of short-term bindings; Daedric Artefacts like Mehrunes Razor and the Masque of Clavicus Vile are examples of long-term bindings.

The Tribunal Temple of Morrowind has incorporated the veneration of Daedra as lesser spirits subservient to the immortal Almsivi, the Triune godhead of Almalexia, Sotha Sil, and Vivec. These subordinate Daedra are divided into the Good Daedra and the Bad Daedra. The Good Daedra have willingly submitted to the authority of Almsivi; the Bad Daedra are rebels who defy Almsivi—treacherous kin who are more often adversaries than allies.

The Bad Daedra are Boethiah, Azura, and Mephala. The hunger is a powerful and violent lesser Daedra associated with Boethiah, Father of Plots—a sinuous, long-limbed, long-tailed creature with a beast-skulled head, noted for its paralysing touch and its ability to disintegrate weapons and armour. The winged twilight is a messenger of Azura, Goddess of Dusk and Dawn. Winged Twilight resemble the feral harpies of the West, though the feminine aspects of the winged twilights are more ravishing, and their long, sharp, hooked tails are immeasurably more deadly. Spider Daedra are the servants of Mephala, taking the form of spider-humanoid centaurs, with a naked upper head, torso, and arms of human proportions, mounted on the eight legs and armoured carapace of a giant spider. Unfortunately, these Daedra are so fierce and irrational that they cannot be trusted to head the commands of the Spinner. As a consequence, few sorcerers are willing to either summon or bind such creatures in Morrowind.

The Bad Daedra are Mehrunes Dagon, Malacath, Sheogorath, and Molag Bal. Three lesser Daedra
are associated with Mehrunes Dagon: the agile and pesky scamp, the ferocious and beast-like clannfear, and the noble and deadly dremora. The crocodile-headed humanoid Daedra called the Daedroth is a servant of Molag Bal, while the giant but dim-witted ogrim is a servant of Malacath. Sheogorath’s lesser Daedra, the Golden Saints, a half-clothed human female in appearance, is highly resistant to magic and a dangerous spellcaster.

Another type of lesser Daedra often encountered in Morrowind is the Atronach, or Elemental Daedra. Atronachs have no binding kinship or alignments with the Daedra Lords, serving one realm or another at whim, shifting sides according to seduction, compulsion, or opportunity.
Daughter of the Niben

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

BRAVIL
Daughter of the Niben

By
Sathyr Longleat

Bravil is one of the most charming towns in Cyrodiil, sparkling in her simple beauty, illustrious by her past. No visit to the southern part of the Imperial Province is complete without a walk along Bravil’s exciting river port, a talk with her friendly native children, and, of course, in the tradition of the village, a whispered word to the famous statue of the Lucky Old Lady.

Many thousands of years before the arrival of the Atmorans, the native Ayleid people had long lived in the vicinity of modern day Bravil. The Niben then, as now, provided food and transportation, and the village was even more populous than it is today. We are not certain what they called their regions: as insular as they were, the word they used would be translated to simply mean “home”. These savage Ayleid were so firmly entrenched that the Bravil region was one of the very last areas to be liberated by the Alessian army in the second century of the 1st era. Though little remains of that era culturally or archeologically, thank Mara, the tales of Debauchery and depravity have entered into the realm of legends.

How the Ayleids were able to survive such a long siege is debated by scholars to this day. All, however, grant the honour of victory to one of the Empress Alessia’s centurions, a man called Teo Bravillius Tasus, the man for whom the modern town is named.

It was said he invaded the village no less than four times, after heavy resistance, but each time upon the morning dawning, all his soldiery within would be dead, murdered. By the time more centuria had arrived, the fortified town was repopulated with Ayleids. After the second successful invasion, secret underground tunnels were found and filled in, but once again, come morning, the soldiers were dead again, and the citizens had returned. After the third successful siege, legions were posted outside of the town, watching the roads and riverway for signs of attacks, but no one came. The next morning, the bodies of the invading soldiers were thrown from the parapets of the town’s walls.

Teo Bravillius Tasus knew that the Ayleids must be hiding themselves somewhere in the town, waiting until nightfall, and then murdering the soldiers while they slept. The question was where. After the fourth invasion, he himself led the soldiers in a thorough inspection of every corner, every shadow. Just as they were ready to give up, the great centurion noticed two curious things. High in the sheer walls of the town, beyond anyone’s ability to climb, there were indentations, narrow platforms. And by the river just inside the town, he discovered a single footprint from someone clearly not wearing an Imperial boot.

The Ayleids, it seemed, had taken two routes to hide themselves. Some had levitated themselves up
to the walls and hidden themselves high above, and others had slipped into the river, where they were able to breathe water. It was a relatively easy task once the strange elves’ even stranger hiding holes had been discovered to rout them out, and see to it that there were no more midnight assassinations of the Empress’s troops.

It may seem beyond belief that an entire community could be so skilled in these spells hundreds and hundreds of years before the Mages Guild was formed to teach the ways of magicka to the common folk. There does, however, appear to be evidence that, just as the Psijics on the Isle of Artaeum developed Mysticism long before there was a name for it, the even more obscure Ayleids of southern Cyrodiil had developed what was to be known as the school of Alteration. It is not, after all, much of a stretch when one considers that other Ayleids at the time of Bravil’s conquering and even later were shapeshifters. The community of pre-Bravil could not turn into beasts and monsters, but they could alter their bodies to hide themselves away. A related and useful skill, to be sure. But not so effective to save themselves in the end.

Very little is left of the Ayleid presence in Bravil of today, though architectural marvels of other kinds are very evident. As beautiful and arresting as the Benevolence of Mara cathedral and the lord’s palace are, no manmade structure in Bravil is as famous as the statue called the Lucky Old Lady.

The tales about the Lady and who she was are too numerous to list.

It was said she was born the illegitimate daughter of a prostitute of Bravil, certainly an inauspicious beginning to a lucky life. She was teased by other children, who forever asked her who her father was. Every day, she would run back to her little shack in tears from their cruelty.

One day, a priest of Stendarr came to Bravil to do charitable work. He saw the weeping girl, and when asked, she told him the cause of her misery: she did not know who her father was. “You have kind eyes and a mouth that tells no lies,” replied the priest after a moment, smiling. “You are clearly a child of Stendarr, the God of Mercy, Charity, and Well-Earned Luck.”

The priest’s thoughtful words changed the girl forever. Whenever she was asked who her father was, she would cheerfully reply, “I am a child of Luck.”

She grew up to be a barmaid, it was said, kind and generous to her customers, frequently allowing them to pay when they were able to. On a particularly rainy night, she gave shelter to a young man dressed in rags, who not only had no money to pay, but was belligerent and rude to her as she fed him and gave him a room. The next morning, he left without so much as a thank you. Her friends and family admonished her, saying that she had to be careful, he might have even been dangerous.

A week later, a royal carriage arrived in Bravil, with an Imperial prince within. Though he was scarcely recognisable, it was the same young man the Lady had helped. He apologised profusely for his appearance and behaviour, explaining that he had been kidnapped and cursed by a band of witches, and it wasn’t until later he had returned to his senses. The Lady was showered with riches, which she, of course, generously shared with all the people of Bravil, where she lived to a content old age.

No one knows when the statue to her was erected in the town square, or who the artist was, but it has stood there for thousands of years, since the first era. To this day, visitors and Bravillians alike go to the Lucky Old Lady to ask for her to bless them with luck in their travels.

Just one more charming aspect of the charming, and very lucky village of Bravil.
Daynas Valen's Journal

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Daynas Valen’s Journal

18th of Morning Star, 4E 201

How long has it been since I first heard the Gauldur legend? Eighty years? A hundred? I can think of nothing else now. My goal is at hand.

After years of searching, I finally traced the Ivory Claw to a collector in Bravil. He death was necessary. But I have it. At last, I have it.

22nd of Morning Star, 4E 201

Three days of nonstop riding. I reached Anvil ahead of my pursuers, and took passage on the Icerunner, bound for Solitude once more.

29th of Morning Star, 4E 201

The other passengers are getting suspicious. Returning from dinner, I caught one brute rooting around in my quarters. He almost found the claw. Had the captain not intervened, I would have flayed him alive.

I hope to spend the voyage sequestered in my room, reviewing my notes and preparing spells, but I need to deflect some attention from myself. I’ll have to mingle, pretend to be just another pretty mage. For now.

2nd of Sun’s Dawn, 4E 201

The brute claims to be an adventurer, off to seek his fortune in the ruins of Skyrim with his companions. Perhaps I can turn this to my advantage, use them as fodder for the traps and Draugr within the tombs. I can see the greed in his eyes. Yes, that should work.

Three weeks to Solitude, the captain says. If I have to suffer these fools longer than that, I’ll swim.

29th Sun’s Dawn, 4E 201

With the brute and his companions in tow, I led our brand across the marsh to Folgunthur, where we made camp for the night. Little has changed since my first expedition ten years ago. But this time, I have the claw. And I will have the amulet.
I spent all night preparing a synopsis of my notes, in case some fragment of the tale or piece of ancient lore may be needed to bypass the wards within the tomb. Then I cast all my books and scrolls into the fire, and reduced my life’s work to ashes. At long last, today is the day of reckoning. If I cannot have the amulet, no one will.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the late upload! I have been really busy. But hopefully I will be posting more!
Daynas Valen's Notes

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for mentions of death.

Daynas Valen’s Notes

How to summarise a lifetime of research? So little of what I have learned matters now—the petty politics of ancient times, the age-long campaign to wipe out all mention of the Gauldur name.

I know not what awaits us within Folgunthur, so here, then, is the truth of the tale, as best I have been able to piece it together.

In the opening days of the First Era, the Archmage Gauldur was revered throughout the north. Wisdom, wealth, honour, and power were his, and even Ysgramor’s heirs sought his counsel.

Smother by his shadow, Gauldur’s three sons grew cruel and resentful. They lusted after their father’s power and prestige, and eventually, Jyrik, the eldest, discovered its source: a mysterious amulet, from which he never parted. Together, they conspired to murder their father in his sleep and divide his amulet between them. And so it was done.

Consumed by their newfound power, the brothers laid waste to the surrounding villages. So great was the carnage that the High King himself intervened, sending a company of battlemages led by the Archmage Geirmund to subdue the brothers. And after a devastating battle, the three fled to the field.

Mikrul, the youngest, was run to ground in Folgunthur, the ancient barows at the foot of Solitude. And though he fought for three days and nights, he was at last overcome and entombed there, his crypt sealed by an ivory claw.

Geirmund pursued Jyrik to the shattered crypts of Saarthal, half-buried even then. Ten veteran wizards fell before Jyrik’s eternal magic, but he could not overcome them all together. He too fell, and was sealed within the ruined city.

And at last, Sidgis was cornered in the southernmost reaches of Skyrim. He challenged the Lord Geirmund to a duel, knowing his foe was honour-bound to accept. And they clashed in battle, matched strength for strength, and fell together on the field before Ivarstead. The High King ordered a tomb built for Geirmund on the lake which still bears his name and had Sidgis sealed within, forever guarded by the one who slew him.

Gauldur himself was interred in a cave not far from where his tower once stood, in the place called Reachwater Rock. And when it was done, King Harald issued an edict: the names and deeds of Gauldur and his sons were to be expunged from every record, every chronicle. Under pain of death, no word of them was to be spoken, lest any try to recover the amulet that had been sealed at so great a cost.

And so it was. But a little survived the ages. Enough.
Four thousand years have passed, and the tombs remain sealed. The fragments of The Gauldur Amulet lie within. Since the day I first heard the rumour, I have felt its power, calling to me, pulling at me. I will be the one to reclaim it, restore it, bear it out into the world once more. I must have it. I must!
De Rerum Dirennis

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for death

De Rerum Dirennis

by Vorian Direnni

DE RERUM DIRENNIS

By

Vorian Direnni

I am six-hundred-and-eleven years old. I have never had children of my own, but I have many nieces and nephews and cousins who have been raised with the tales and traditions of our ancient, illustrious, and occasionally notorious clan, the Direnni. Few families in Tamriel can boast so many famous figures, wielding so much power over the fate of so many. Our warriors and kings are stuff of legend, and it is not to dismiss their honour and their achievements to say you have heard quite enough about them.

I myself have never picked up a sword or written an important law, but I am part of a lesser known but still important Direnni tradition: the way of the wizard. My own autobiography would be of little interest to posterity—though my nephew, nieces, and cousins indulge me to tell wild tales of life in the chaotic Second Era of Tamriel—but I have a few ancestors whose stories should be told. They may have changed history as we know it as dramatically as my better known relatives, but their names are in danger of being forgotten.

Most recently, Lysandus, the King of Daggerfall, was able to conquer his ancient enemies of Sentinel in part thanks to his court sorceress, Medora Direnni. Her grandfather Jovron Direnni was Imperial Battlemage to the court of the Dunmer Empress of Tamriel, Katariah, assisting her in creating peace in a time of turmoil. His great great grandfather Pelladil Direnni had a similar role with the first Potentate, and encouraged the Guild Act without which we would not have all the professional organisations we have today. His ancestor, many times back, was the witch Raven Direnni, who with her better known cousins Aiden and Ryain, brought an end to the tyranny of the latter Alessian Empire. Before the Psijics of Artaeum, it is said, she created the art of enchantment, learning how to bind a soul into a gem and use that to ensorcel all manners of weaponry.

But it is the story of an ancestor even more ancient, more distant than Raven I wish to tell.

Asliel Direnni harkens back to the humble beginnings of our clan, in the tiny farming village of Tyrigel on the banks of the river Caomus which was then called the Diren, hence the family name. Like all on Summerset Isle in those days, he was a simple planter of the fields. But while others only grew enough to sustain their immediate kin, even distant cousins of the Dirennis worked together. They would decide as a group which fields were best for wheat, orchard, vine, livestock, or apiary, and thereby always have the best yields of any farm which worked alone, doing the best that it could with what it had.
Asliel had a particularly poor farm for most kind of agriculture, but small herbs found its stony, loamless, acidic soil very comfortable. Out of necessity more than anything else he became an expert on all manners of herbs. For the most part, of course, they were used in flavouring cooking, but as you know, hardly any plant grows on the surface of our world without a magickal potential.

Even so long ago, witches already were in existence. It would be ridiculous for me to suggest that Asliel Direnni invented alchemy. What he did, what we can all be grateful for, is that he formulated it into an art and science.

There were no witches’ covens in Tyrigel, and, of course, there would be no Mages Guild yet for thousands of years, so people would come to him for cures. He learned for himself the exact formula for combining black lichen and roobrush to create a cure for all manners of poison, and the amount of willow anther to crush and mix with chokeweed to cure diseases.

There were few much greater threats in Tyrigel in those peaceful days than disease or accidental poisonings. Yes, there were some dark forces in the wilderness, trolls, chimera, the occasional malevolent fairy folk and Will-O-The-Wisp, but even the youngest, most foolish Altmer knew how to avoid them. There were, however, a few unusual threats which Asliel had a hand in defeating.

One of the tales told of him that I believe to be true is how he was brought a young niece who had been suffering from an unknown disease. Despite his ministrations, she grew weaker and weaker every morning. Finally, he gave her a bitter tasting drink, and the next morning, ashes were found all around her bed. A vampire had been feeding on the poor girl, but Asliel’s potion had turned her very blood into poison, without harming her in the least.

If only this formula had not been lost in the mists of history!

This would have been enough to make him a minor but significant figure in the annals of early Summerset, but at that point in history, a barbarian tribe called the Locvar had found their way down the Diren River, and recognised Tyrigel as a rich target for raids. The Direnni, not being warriors yet but simple farmers, were helpless and could only flee and watch the Locvar take the best of their crops, raid after raid.

Asliel, however, had been experimenting with the vampire dust, and brought his cousins to him with a plan. The next time the Locvar were sighted on the Diren, the word went out and all the most able-bodied came to Asliel’s laboratory. When the barbarians arrived in Tyrigel, they found the farms deserted, and assumed they had all fled as usual. As they set about stealing the bounty, they suddenly found themselves under attack by invisible forces. Believing the Direnni farms to be haunted, they ran away very quickly.

They attempted a few more raids, for their greed would always eventually overpower their fear, and each time, they were set upon by attackers who they could not see. As barbaric as they were, they were not stupid, and they changed their mind about the source of their defeat. It could not be that the farms were haunted, because the crops were still being tended and harvested, and the animals seemed to show no fear. The Locvar decided to send a scout to the farm to see if he could spy their secret.

The scout sent back to the Locvar that the Direnni farms were populated with flesh and blood, entirely visible Altmer. He continued to watch as his barbarian cohorts moved down the river, and he saw the elderly and children flee for the hills, while the able-bodied farmers and their wives went to Asliel’s laboratory. He saw them go in; he saw no one come out.

As usual, the Locvar were repelled by invisible forces, but their scout soon told them what he saw happening in the laboratory.
The next night, two of the Locvar approached Asliel’s farm very stealthily, and managed to kidnap him without alerting the rest of the Direnni. The Locvar chieftain, knowing that the farmers could no longer count on the alchemist to make them invisible, considered an immediate attack on the farms. But he was a vengeful sort, and felt he had been humiliated by these simple farmers. A crafty plan emerged in his mind. What if the Direnni, who always saw his barbarian tribe coming, for once did not? Imagine the slaughter if no one even had a chance to flee.

The scout had told the chieftain that Asliel had used the dust of a vampire to make the farmers invisible, but he was not sure what the other ingredient had been. He described an incandescent powder that Asliel had mixed into the dust. Asliel, of course, refused to help the Locvar, but they were experts in torture as well as pillage, and he knew he had to talk or die.

Finally after hours of torture, he agreed to tell them what the incandescent powder was. He did not know the name, but called it “Glow Dust”, the only remains of a slain Will-O-The-Wisp. He told them that they would need a lot of it if they wanted to turn the whole tribe invisible for the raid.

The Locvar grumbled that not only did they have to find and kill a vampire to attain his dust, but find and kill several Will-O-The-Wisps to get theirs. In a few days time, they came back with the ingredients the alchemist asked for. The chieftain, not being a complete idiot, made Asliel taste the potion first. He did as he was told and turned invisible, demonstrating that it did truly work. The chieftain put him to work creating more. No one apparently noticed that while he did, he was nibbling on black lichen and roobrush.

The Locvar took the potion as he dolled it out, and soon, but not too soon that they didn’t suffer, they were all dead.

The scout who had seen Asliel mixing the invisibility potion had apparently mistook the glow of the candlelight in the laboratory for an incandescence which the second ingredient of the invisibility potion did not possess. The second ingredient was actually a dull, simple redwort, one of the most common herbs in Tamriel. When they had insisted during torture that Asliel tell them what the incandescent powder was, Asliel remembered that he had once experimentally mixed glow dust and vampire dust together once and created a powerful poison. It was simple enough to steal a little redwort from the barbarian’s camp, mix that with the vampire and glow dust mixture, and create a potion that was in fact an invisibility potion. After curing himself, he gave the poison to the barbarians.

The Locvar, being dead, never again raided the Direnni farms, and having no other enemies, they were able to grow more and more prosperous and powerful. Generations later, they left Summerset and began their historic adventures on the Tamriel mainland. Asliel Direnni, because of his excellence as an alchemist, was invited to Artaeum and became a Psijic. It is not known how many more common formulas we know today were invented by him there, but I have no doubt, the science and art of alchemy as we know it today would not exist without him.

But that is all in the distant past. Asliel’s innovations, like my modest ones, like the achievements of the Direnni throughout history, are but a stepping stone to the wonders which will come in the future. I wish I could be there to witness them, but if I can only share some of the past with the children of Direnni and the children of Tamriel, then I will consider my life well spent.
The Death Blow of Abernanit With Explains by the sage Geocrates Varnus

by Anonymous

The Death Blow of Abernanit
With Explains by the sage
Geocrates Varnus

Broken battlements and wrecked walls
Where worship of the Horror (1) once embraced.
The bites of fifty winters (2) frost and wind
Have cracked and pitted the unholy gates,
And brought down the cruel, obscene spire.
All is dust, all is nothing more than dust.
The blood has dried and screams have echoed out.
Framed by the hills in the wildest, forelorn place
Of Morrowind
Sits the barren bones of Abernanit.

When thrice-blessed Rangidil (3) first saw Abernanit,
It burnished silver bright with power and permanence.
A dreadful place with dreadful men to guard it
With fever glassed eyes and strength through the Horror.
Rangidil saw the foes’ number was far greater
Than the few Ordinators and and Buoyant Armigers he led,
Watching from the hills above, the field and castle of death
While it stood, it damned the souls of the people
Of Morrowind.
Accursed, iniquitous castle Abernanit.

The alarum was sounded calling the holy warriors to battle
To answer villiany’s shield with justice’s spear,
To steel themselves to fight at the front and be brave.
Rangidil too grasped his shield and his thin ebony spear
And the clamour of battle began with a resounding crash
To shake the clouds down from the sky.
The shield wall was smashed and blood staunched
The ground of the field, a battle like no other
Of Morrowind
To destroy the evil of Abernanit.
The maniacal horde were skilled at arms, for certes,
But the three holy fists of Mother, Lord, and Wizard (4) pushed
The monster’s army back in charge after charge.
Rangidil saw from above, urging the army to defend,
Dagoth Thras (5) himself in his pernicious tower spire,
And knew that only when the heart of evil was caught
Would the land e’er be truly saved.
He pledge then by the Temple and the Holy Tribunal
Of Morrowind
To take the tower of Abernanit.

In a violent push, the tower base was pierced,
But all efforts to fell the spire came to naught
As if all the strength of the Horror held that one tower.
The stairwell up was steep and so tight
That two warriors could not ascend it side by side.
So single-file the army clambered up and up
To take the tower room and end the reign
Of one of the cruelest petty tyrants in the annals
Of Morrowind,
Dagoth Thras of Abernanit.

They awaited a victory cry from the first to scale the tower
But silence only returned, and then the blood,
First only a rivulet and then a scarlet course
Poured down the steep stairwell, with a cry from above,
“Dagoth Thras is besting our army one by one!”
Rangidil called his army back, every Ordinator and
Buoyant Armiger, and he himself ascended the stairs,
Passing the bloody remains of the best warriors
Of Morrowind
To the tower room of Abernanit.

Like a raven of death on its aerie was Dagoth Thras
Holding bloody shield and bloody blade at the tower room door.
Every thrust of Rangidil’s spear was blocked with ease;
Every slash of Rangidil’s blade was deflected away;
Every blow of Rangidil’s mace was met by the shield;
Every quick arrow shot could find no purchase
For the Monster’s greatest power was in his dread blessing
That no weapon from no warrior found in all
Of Morrowind
Could pass the shield of Abernanit.

As hour passed hour, Rangidil came to understand
How his greatest warriors met their end with Dagoth Thras.
For he could exhaust them by blocking their attacks
And then, thus weakened, they were simply cut down.
The villain was patient and skilled with the shield
And Rangidil felt even his own mighty arms growing numbs
While Dagoth Thras anticipated and blocked each cut
And Rangidil feared that without the Divine Three
Of Morrowind
He’d die in the tower of Abernanit.

But he still poured down blows as he yelled,
Foe! I am Rangidil, a prince of the True Temple,
And I’ve fought in many a battle, and many a warrior
Has tried to stop my blade and has failed.
Very few can anticipate which blow I’m planning,
And fewer, knowing that, know how to arrest the design,
Or have the the strength to absorb all of my strikes.
There is no greater master of shield blocking in all
Of Morrowind
Then here in the castle Abernanit.

My foe, dark lord Dagoth Thras, before you slay me,
I beg you, tell me how you know how to block.”
Wickedly proud, Dagoth Thras heard Rangidil’s plea,
And decided that before he gutted the Temple champion,
He would deign to give him some knowledge for the afterlife,
How his instinct and reflexes worked, and as he started
To explain, he realised that he did not know how he did it,
And watched, puzzled, as Rangidil delivered what the tales
Of Morrowind
Called “The death blow of Abernanit.”

Geocrates Varnus explains:

(1) “The Horror” refers to the daedra prince Mehrunes Dagon.

(2) “Fifty winters” suggests that the epic was written fifty years after the siege of Abernanit, which took place in 3E 150.

(3) “Thrice-blessed Rangidil” is Rangidil Ketil, born 2E 803, died 3E 195. He was the commander of the Temple Ordinators, and “thrice-blessed” by being blessed by the Tribunal of Gods.

(4) “Mother, Lord, and Wizard” refers to the Tribunal of Almalexia, Vivec, and Sotha Sil.

(5) “Dagoth Thras” was a powerful daedra-worshipper of unknown origins who declared himself the heir of the Sixth House, though there is little evidence he descended from the vanished family.
Death of a Wanderer

Chapter Notes

Sorry it's been so long lol

Enjoy the answer to the question we've all been asking since the game came out.

The Death of a Wanderer

by Anonymous

The last time I saw the old Argonian, I was taken by how alive he seemed, even though he was in the throes of death.

“The secret,” he said, “of staying alive… is not in running away, but swimming directly at danger. Catches them off-guard.”

“Is that how you managed to fine this claw?” I asked, brandishing the small carving as if it were a weapon. I had found it among his possessions, which I was helping him to divvy amongst his beneficiaries. “Should it also go to your cousin? Dives-From-Below?”

At this, his mouth widened, exposing his fangs. If I hadn’t known him as long as I had I would think he was snarling, but I knew that to be a smile. He croaked a few times to attempt laughter, but ended up wheezing and coughing, his rancid blood spraying across the bedsheets.

“Do you know what that is?” he asked between coughing fits.

“I’ve heard stories,” I answered, “the same as you. Looks like one of the claws, for opening the sealing-doors in the ancient crypts. I’ve never seen one myself, before.”

“Then you know I would only wish that thing upon a mortal enemy. Giving it to my cousin would just encourage him to run into one of those barrows and get split by a Draugr blade.”

“So you want me to have it, then?” I joked. “Where did you even get this?”

“My kind can find things that your people assumed were gone. Drop something to the bottom of a lake, and a Nord will never see it again. Amazing what you can find along the bottoms.”

He was staring at the ceiling now, and by the way his fogged eyes darted around, I could tell he was seeing his memories instead of the cracked stone above us.

“Did you ever try to use it?” I whispered to him, hoping he could hear me through his fog.

“Of course!” he snapped, suddenly lucid. His eyes widened and fixed on me. “Where do you think I got this?” he barked, tearing his tunic open to show a white scar forming a large star-shaped knot in the scales beneath his right shoulder. “Blasted Draugr got the drop on me. Just too many of them.”

I felt awful, since I knew how much he hated talking about the battles he had been in. To him, it
was enough that he had survived, and any stories would amount to boasting. We both sat quietly for several minutes, his laboured breathing the only sound.

He was the one to break the silence. “You know what always bothered me?” he asked. “Why they even bothered with the symbols.”

“The what?”

“The symbols, you fool, look at the claw.”

I turned it over in my hand. Sure enough, etched into the face were three animals. A bear, an owl, and some kind of insect.

“What do the symbols mean, Deerkaza?”

“The sealing-doors. It’s not enough to just have the claw. They’re made of massive stone wheels that must align with the claw’s symbols before they’ll open. It’s a sort of lock, I suppose. But I didn’t know why they bothered with them. If you had the claw, you also had the symbols to open the door. So why…”

He was broken up by a coughing fit. It was the most I had heard him speak in months, but I could tell how much of a struggle it was. I knew his mind, though, and helped the thought along.

“Why even have the combination if you’re going to write it on the key?”

“Exactly. But as I lay bleeding on that floor, I figured it out. The Draugr are restless, but far from clever. Once I was downed, they continued shuffling about. To no aim. No direction. Bumping against one another, the walls.”

“So?”

“So the symbols on the doors weren’t meant to be another lock. Just a way of ensuring the person entering was actually alive and had a functioning mind.”

“Then the doors…”

“Were never meant to keep people out. They were meant to keep the Draugr in.”

And with that, he fell back asleep. When he awoke several days later, he refused to talk about the Draugr at all, and would only wince and clutch his shoulder if I tried to bring them up.
4E20

This tower once served as a meeting place where those brave souls who achieved safe passage to Skyrim would find loved ones, and leave notice for others who could not be found.

Let it stand in honour for those who had the strength and spirit to accept Skyrim’s offer “untithed to any thane or hold, and self-governed, with free worship, with no compensation to Skyrim or the Empire except as writ in the Armistice of old wheresoever those might still apply, and henceforth let no Man or Mer say that the Sons and Daughters of Kyne are without mercy or honour.”

We, the Jarls of Skyrim, hereby decree this site as monument to the struggle of those who fled their native home of Morrowind in the time following the Red Year.
The Diary of Faire Agarwen

Diary of Faire Agarwen

by Faire Agarwen

Translated by Calcelmo

Faire Agarwen Life Record

Third Marking
Tenth Kulniir

It feels like years since we were forced into hiding. I dare not write where we stay in fear of endangering the good people of this house should this diary be discovered. We have been shown a kindness by this family once known to the Snow Prince. Even in death his great influence has ensured our safety. We were separated from many of our kin along the road when it became increasingly difficult to travel discreetly in our numbers. We were forced to go our separate ways and travel only at night. I have heard no news of where the others may have gone and fear I never shall. Our lives are forever changed.

Seventh Marking
Tenth Kulniir

In the night I find it difficult not to focus on times past. There are moments in my rest when I still hear the laughing of young ones at play in the valley. Other times I see the pale fleckes of happy moments which were once so common in the land of the Snow Elves. I try not to dwell on these memories too long. Often the surroundings make it impossible to dwell on any happiness. We have been locked together in such close quarters for so long. We grow tired of each other’s company. Even the strongest of us have faltered, with nothing to do but think on what is lost. I wake each day to forlorn faces and am reminded of where we are and all we have left behind. We are all yearning for a day when we can emerge from hiding and walk freely in the light once more, but I fear we are losing all hope that such a day will even come.

Tenth Marking
Tenth Kulniir

I tire of the tears of the women and children. My own have run dry. The men have begun to look all weak, yet we have survived the same trials as they. I cannot bring myself to think on the numbers we lost in battle, yet I cannot force the images of my own losses from my mind and now, in a time when our people should be banding together in feels, we are drifting apart. The Nords have truly won. Our once great pride and unity are shattered. If we lost hope now we will never survive. Today many, myself included, have tried to speak out in voices of reason. There can be no hope without talk of our future. We can make no difference if our spirits remain broken.

Eighteenth Marking
Tenth Kulniir
We know that we can never again be the Snow Elves and live freely. In that world we will forever be in hiding in one form or another, but there is no reason we cannot live life with the sun and the wind against our skin. There are those here who are friends to us and plan to help us once the threat has ended. We know now to survive, we must be born anew outside. We will appear. We belong here inside. We will carry our truth and our scars.
Discovering Ruunvald, Vol I

by Moric Sidrey

I have decided to document our expedition to find Ruunvald in my journals, with hopes that, should we fail, it will bring illumination to those who follow us. I myself have stood on the shoulders of academic giants to get where we are today, spending endless hours in libraries and private collections. I am certain that there is some artefact of great power to be found in those ruins, one that the Vigilants could find useful in their mission.

I do not mean to sound pompous, but I feel as if I am on the precipice of my destiny with this quest. I am certain we are digging in the right place. I can feel it in my bones, and I dream of finding Ruunvald at night. Even in my waking hours, I can almost hear a reassuring voice telling me we are going the right way.

The expedition has had a great deal of luck so far. After only a few weeks, the first tunnel broke through into a large shaft, leading downward towards where I suspect to find Ruunvald. With just a few bits of carpentry, we’ve established our first base camp within the mountains. If we continue to be this fortuitous, we shall reach our goal in record time!

M. Sidrey
Discovering Ruunvald, Vol II

Our luck continues! Not only do we continue to tunnel into caves and shafts that speed our descent, but struck multiple veins of precious ore. Now that the excavation has proven to be a financial success, the Vigilants have sent more supplies, materials, and workers to further the cause. I find myself unable to contain my glee at times, and have become prone to cheerful outbursts in front of the men. One might find this very out of character for me, but the men seem to share my enthusiasm. Never before have I worked with a group so single-minded in their pursuit. To have so many people working towards the same goal with little to no deviation from the task at hand is an uncanny blessing! Stendarr be praised!

With so much going well, I hesitate to document what seem like minor troubles in comparison. It must have something to do with the cramped spaces, but I have found myself prone to aches in my head. While these hardly deter me from my leadership role, I have found myself distracted at times. I have had many a conversation where I drift off, only to have them call me back to reality. Sometimes I lose small amounts of time and can’t remember what I’ve done. I am hoping this is nothing more than excitement of reaching our goal, but I will try to keep note as we dig deeper. Perhaps a half tankard of ale before sleep will help me with these headaches.

M. Sidrey
The damnable headaches! Minorne be merciful, I just can’t seem to shake them. The workers have started to report them as well, but while their focus on conversation and civility may wane because of it, they have not swayed from their task. If anything, they seem to have doubled their efforts. I myself cannot seem to focus on anything other than the dig. I sit here now, studying some unearthed Nordic artefacts, yet I feel a nagging call to see how the dig is progressing. The other day without thinking, I picked up a shovel and started digging myself. Fortunately, no one seemed to find this unusual, which is a blessing. I’d hate for the Vigilants of Minorne to think that I’d lost my senses!

As we dig, we uncover more Nordic ruins and architecture, but have yet to hit the main chamber. Everyday I dream we’ll finally reach Ruunvald, and I can’t help but reflect on what this will mean to my reputation! My family will be so proud, especially my father, Minorne. He and mother have always been interested in my studies, even if my sister Minorne was not. But I’m most excited to reveal my findings to my colleagues, Minorne and Minorne, and perhaps my mentor Minorne. Oh, won’t they all be pleased?

M. Sidrey
Discovering Ruunvald, Vol IV

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Discovering Ruunvald, Vol IV

by Moric Sidrey

I have found my muse and her name is Minorne. Reading back over old journals, I realise she has called to me from deep within Ruunvald. She is the voice I’ve been hearing, the one who has called me ever downwards into the mountains. The Vigilants, the workers, they hear her too! What joy to learn that I am not alone in her love! Oh, Minorne, how would we have ever found this place without you! As I write this we are digging out the last bit of rock to get to you. Those without tools have started using their hands! I cannot write anymore, I must get back to work. Ruunvald awaits!

M. Sidrey
The Doors of Oblivion

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

The Doors of Oblivion

by Seif-ij Hidja

“When thou enterest into Oblivion, Oblivion entereth into thee.”

— Nai Tyrol-Llar

The greatest mage who ever lived was my master Morian Zenas. You have heard of him as the author of the book ‘On Oblivion’, the standard text for all on matters Daedric. Despite many entreaties over the years, he refused to update his classic book with his new discoveries and theories because he found that the more one delves into these realms, the less certain one is. He did not want conjecture, he wanted fact.

For decades before and after the publication of ‘On Oblivion’, Zenas compiled a vast personal library on the subject of Oblivion, the home of the Daedra. He divided his time between this research and personal magickal growth, on the assumption that should he succeed in finding a way into the dangerous world beyond and behind ours, he would need much power to wander its dark paths.

Twelve years before Zenas began the journey he had prepared his life to make, he hired me as his assistant. I possessed the three attributes he required for the position: I was young and eager to help without question; I could read any book once and memorise its contents; and, despite my youth, I was already a Master of Conjuration.

Zenas too was a Master of Conjuration—indeed, a Master at all the known and unknown schools—but he did not want to rely on his ability alone in the most perilous of his research. In an underground vault, he summoned Daedra to interview them on their native land, and for that he needed another Conjurer to make certain they came, were bound, and were sent away again without incident.

I will never forget that vault, not for its looks which was plain and unadorned, but for what you couldn’t see. There were scents that lingered long after the summoned creatures had left, flowers and sulfur, sex and decay, power and madness. They haunt me still to this day.

Conjuration, for the layman unacquainted with its workings, connects the caster’s mind with that of the summoned. It is a tenuous link, meant only to lure, hold, and dismiss, but in the hands of a Master, it can be much stronger. The Psijics and Dwemer can (in the Dwemer’s case, perhaps I should say, could) connect with the minds of others, and converse miles apart—a skill that is sometimes called telepathy.

Over the course of my employment, Zenas and I developed such a link between one another. It was accidental, a result of two powerful Conjurers working closely together, but we decided that it
would be invaluable should we succeed in travelling to Oblivion. Since the denizens of that land could be touched even by the skills of an amateur Conjurer, it was possible we could continue to communicate while he was there, so I could record his discoveries.

The ‘Doors to Oblivion’, to use Morian Zenas’s phrase, are not easily found, and we exhausted many possibilities before we found one where we held the key.

The Psijics of Artaeum have a place they call The Dreaming Cave, where it is said no one can enter into the Daedric realms and return. Iachesis, Sotha Sil, Nematigh, and many others have been recorded as using this means, but despite many entreaties to the Order, we were denied its use. Celarus, the leader of the Order, has told us it has been sealed off for the safety of all.

We had hopes of using the ruins of the Battlespire to access Oblivion. The Weir Gate still stands, though the old proving grounds of the Imperial Battlemages itself was shattered some years ago in Jagar Tharn’s time. Sadly, after an exhaustive search through the detritus, we had to conclude that when it was destroyed, all access to the realms beyond, the Soul Cairn, the Shade Perilous and the Havoc Wellhead, had been broken. It was probably for the good, but it frustrated our goal.

The reader may have heard of other Doors, and he may be assured we attempted to find them all.

Some are pure legend, or at any rate, not traceable based on the information left behind. There are references in lore to Marukh’s Abyss, the Corryngton Mirror, the Mantellan Crux, the Crossroads, the Mouth, a riddle of alchemical formula called Jacinth and Rising Sun, and many other places and objects that are said to be Doors, but we could not find.

Some exist, but cannot be entered safely. The whirlpool in the Abecean called the Maelstrom of Bal can make ships disappear, and may be a portal into Oblivion, but the trauma of riding its waters would surely slay any who tried. Likewise, we did not consider it worth the risk to leap from the Pillar of Thras, a thousand foot tall spiral of coral, though we witnessed the sacrifices the sloads made there. Some victims were killed by the fall, but some, indeed, seemed to vanish before being dashed on the rocks. Since the sload did not seem certain why some were taken and some died, we did not favour the odds of the plunge.

The simplest and most maddeningly complex way to go to Oblivion was simply to cease to be here, and begin to be there. Throughout history, there are examples of mages who seemed to travel to the realms beyond ours seemingly at will. Many of these voyagers are long dead, if they ever existed, but we were able to find one still living. In a tower off Zafirbel Bay on the island of Vvardenfell in the province of Morrowind there exists a very old, very reclusive wizard named Divayth Fyr.

He was not easy to reach, and he was reluctant to share with Morian Zenas the secret Door to Oblivion. Fortunately, my master’s knowledge of lore impressed Fyr, and he taught him the way. I would be breaking my promise to Zenas and Fyr to explain the procedure here, and I would not divulge it even if I could. If there is dangerous knowledge to be had, that is it. But I do not reveal too much to say that Fyr’s scheme relied on exploiting a series of portals to various realms created by a Telvanni wizard long missing and presumed dead. Against the disadvantage of this limited number of access points, we weighed the relative reliability and security of passage, and considered ourselves fortunate in our informant.

Morian Zenas then left this world to begin his exploration. I stayed at the library to transcribe his information and help him with any research he needed.

“Dust,” he whispered to me on the first day of his voyage. Despite the inherent dreariness of the world, I could hear his excitement in his voice, echoing in my mind. “I can see from one end of the
world to the other in a million shades of grey. There is no sky or ground or air, only particles, floating, falling, whirling around me. I must levitate and breathe by magickal means…”

Zenas explored the nebulous land for some time, encountering vapid creatures and palaces of smoke. Though he never met the Prince, we concluded that he was in Ashpit, said to be the home of Malacath, where anguish, betrayal, and broken promises like ash filled the bitter air.

“The sky is on fire,” I heard him say as he moved on to the next realm. “The ground is sludge, but traversable. I see blackened ruins all around me, like a war was fought here in the distant past. The air is freezing. I cast blooms of warmth all around me, but it still feels like daggers of ice stabbing me in all directions.”

This was Coldharbour, where Molag Bal was Prince. It appeared to Zenas as if it were a future Nirn, under the King of Rape, desolate and barren, filled with suffering. I could hear Morian Zenas weep at the images he saw, and shiver at the sight of the Imperial Palace, spattered with blood and excrement.

“Too much beauty,” he gasped when he went to the next realm. “I am half blind. I see flowers and waterfalls, majestic trees, a city of silver, but it is all a blur. The colours run like water. It’s raining now, and the wind smells like perfume. This surely is Moonshadow, where Azura dwells.”

Zenas was right, and astonishingly, he even had audience with the Queen of Dusk and Dawn in her rose palace. She listened to his tale with a smile, and told him of the coming of the Nerevarine. My master found Moonshadow so lovely, he wished to stay there, half-blind, forever, but he knew he must move on and complete his journey of discovery.

“I am in a storm,” he told me as he entered the next realm. He described the landscape of dark twisted trees, howling spirits, and billowing mist, and I thought he might have entered the Deadlands of Mehrunes Dagon. But then he said quickly, “No, I am no longer in a forest. There was a flash of lightning, and now I am on a ship. The mast is tattered. The crew is slaughtered. Something is coming through the waves… oh, gods… Wait, now, I am in a dank dungeon, in a cell…”

He was not in the Deadlands, but Quagmire, the nightmare realm of Vaermina. Every few minutes, there was a flash of lightning and reality shifted, always to something more horrible and horrifying. A dark castle one moment, a den of raving beasts the next, a moonlit swamp, a coffin where he was buried alive. Fear got the better of my master, and he quickly passed to the next realm.

I hear him laugh, “I feel like I’m home now.”

Morian Zenas described to me an endless library, shelves stretching on in every direction, stacks on top of stacks. Pages floated on a mystical wind that he could not feel. Every book had a black cover with no title. He could see no one, but felt the presence of ghosts moving through the stacks, rifling through books, ever searching.

It was Apocrypha. The home of Hermaeus Mora, where all forbidden knowledge can be found. I felt a shudder in my mind, but I could not tell if it was my master’s or mine.

Morian Zenas never travelled to another realm that I know of.

Throughout his visits to the first four realms, my master spoke to me constantly. Upon entering the Apocrypha, he became quieter, as he was lured into the world of research and study, the passions that had controlled his heart while on Nirn. I would frantically try to call to him, but he closed his mind to me.
Then he would whisper, “This cannot be…”

“No one would ever guess the truth…”

“I must learn more…”

“I see the world, a last illusion’s shimmer, it is crumbling all around us…”

I would cry back to him, begging him to tell me what was happening, what he was seeing, what he was learning. I even tried using Conjuration to summon him as if he were a Daedra himself, but he refused to leave. Morian Zenas was lost.

I last received a whisper from him six months ago. Before then, it had been five years, and three before that. His thoughts are no longer intelligible in any language. Perhaps he is still in Apocrypha, lost but happy, in a trap he refuses to escape.

Perhaps he slipped through the stacks and passed into the Madhouse of Sheogorath, losing his sanity forever.

I would save him if I could.

I would silence his whispers if I could.
The Dowry

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Ancient Tales of the Dwemer, Part X: The Dowry

by Marobar Sul

Ynaleigh was the wealthiest landowner in Gunal, and he had over the years saved a tremendous dowry for the man who would marry his daughter, Genefra. When she reached the age of consent, he locked the gold away for safe-keeping, and announced his intention to have her marry. She was a comely lass, a scholar, a great athlete, but dour and brooding in aspect. This personality defect did not bother her potential suitors any more than her positive traits impressed them. Every man knew the tremendous wealth that would be his as the husband of Genefra and son-in-law of Ynaleigh. That alone was enough for hundreds to come to Gunal to pay court.

“The man who will marry my daughter,” said Ynaleigh to the assembled. “Must not be doing so purely out of avarice. He must demonstrate his own wealth to my satisfaction.”

This simple pronouncement removed a vast majority of the suitors, who knew they could not impress the landowner with their meagre fortunes. A few dozen did come forward within a few days, clad in fine killarc cloth of spun silver, accompanied by exotic servants, travelling in magnificent carriages. Of all who came who met with Ynaleigh’s approval, none arrived in a more resplendent fashion than Welyn Naerillic. The young man, who no one had ever heard of, arrived in a shining ebon coach drawn by a team of dragons, his clothing of rarest manufacture, and accompanied by an army of the most fantastical servants any of Gunal had ever seen. Valets with eyes on all sides of their heads, maidservants that seemed cast in gemstones.

But such was not enough with Ynaleigh.

“The man who marries my daughter must prove himself an intelligent fellow, for I would not have an ignoramus as a son-in-law and business partner,” he declared.

This eliminated a large part of the wealthy suitors, who, through their lives of luxury, had never needed to think very much if at all. Still some came forward over the next few days, demonstrating their wit and learning, quoting great sages of the past and offering their philosophies of metaphysics and alchemy. Welyn Naerillic too came and asked Ynaleigh to dine at the villa he had rented outside of Gunal. There the landowner saw scores of scribes working on translations of Aldmeri tracts, and enjoyed the young man’s somewhat irreverent but intriguing intelligence.

Nevertheless, though he was much impressed with Welyn Naerillic, Ynaleigh had another challenge.

“I love my daughter very much,” said Ynaleigh. “And I hope that the man who marries her will make her happy as well. Should any of you make her smile, she and the great dowry are yours.”
The suitors lined up for days, singing her songs, proclaiming their devotion, describing her beauty in the most poetic of terms. Genefra merely glared at all with hatred and melancholia. Ynaleigh who stood by her side began to despair at last. His daughter’s suitors were failing to a man at this task. Finally Welyn Naerillic came to the chamber.

“I will make your daughter smile,” he said. “I dare say, I’ll make her laugh, but only after you’ve agreed to marry us. If she is not delighted within one hour of our engagement, the wedding can be called off.”

Ynaleigh turned to his daughter. She was not smiling, but her eyes had sparked with some morbid curiosity in this young man. As no other suitor had ever registered that for her, he agreed.

“The dowry is naturally not to be paid ’til after you wed,” said Ynaleigh. “Being engaged is not enough.”

“Might I see the dowry still?” asked Welyn.

Knowing how fabled the treasure was and understanding that this would likely be the closest the young man would come to possessing it, Ynaleigh agreed. He had grown quite fond of Welyn. On his orders, Welyn, Ynaleigh, glum Genefra, and the castellan delved deep into the stronghold of Gunal. The first vault had to be opened by touching a series of runic symbols: should one of the marks be mispressed, a volley of poisoned arrows would have struck the thief. Ynaleigh was particularly proud of the next level of security—a lock composed of blades with eighteen tumblers required three keys be turned simultaneously to allow entry. The blades were designed to eviscerate any who merely picked one of the locks. Finally, they reached the storeroom.

It was entirely empty.

“By Lorkhan, we’ve been burgled!” cried Ynaleigh. “But how? Who could have done this?”

“A humble but, if I may say so, rather talented burglar,” said Welyn. “A man who has loved your daughter from afar for many years, but did not possess the glamour or the learning to impress. That is, until the gold from her dowry afforded me the opportunity.”

“You?” bellowed Ynaleigh, scarcely able to believe it. Then something even more unbelievable happened.

Genefra began to laugh. She had never even dreamed of meeting anyone like this thief. She threw herself into his arms before her father’s outraged eyes. After a moment, Ynaleigh too began to laugh.

Genefra and Welyn were married in a month’s time. Though he was in fact quite poor and had little scholarship, Ynaleigh was amazed how much his wealth increased with such a son-in-law and business partner. He only made certain never to ask from whence came the excess gold.

Publisher’s Notes

The tale of a man trying to win the hand of a maiden whose father (usually a wealthy man or king) tests each suitor is quite common. See, for instance, the more recent “The Four Suitors of Benitah” by Jole Yolivess. The behaviour of the characters is quite out of character for the Dwemer. No one today knows their marriage customs, or even if they had marriage at all.

One rather odd theory of the Disappearance of the Dwemer came from this and a few other tales of “Marobar Sul.” It was proposed that the Dwemer never, in fact, left. They did not depart Nirn,
much less the continent of Tamriel, and they are still among us, disguised. These scholars use the story of “Azura and the Box” to suggest that the Dwemer feared Azura, a being they could neither understand nor control, and they adopted the dress and manner of Chimer and Altmer in order to hide from Azura’s gaze.
The Dragon Break

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

The Dragon Break Reexamined

by Fal Droon

The late 3rd era was a period of remarkable religious ferment and creativity. The upheavals of the reign of Uriel Septim VII were only the outward signs of the historical forces that would eventually lead to the fall of the Septim Dynasty. The so called “Dragon Break” was first proposed at the time, by a wide variety of cults and fringe sects across the Empire, connected only by a common obsession with the events Tiber Septim’s rise to power—the “founding myth,” if you will, of the Septim Dynasty.

The basis of the Dragon Break doctrine is now known to be a rather prosaic error in the timeline printed in the otherwise authoritative “Encyclopedia Tamrielica,” first published in 3E 12, during the early years of Tiber Septim’s reign. At that time, the archives of Alinor were still inaccessible to human scholars, and the extant records from the Alessian period were extremely fragmentary. The Alessians had systematically burned all the libraries they could find, and their own records were largely destroyed during the War of Righteousness.

The author of Encyclopedia Tamrielica was apparently unfamiliar with the Alessian “year”, which their priesthood used to record all dates. We now know this refers to the length of the long vision-trances undertaken by the High Priestess, which might last anywhere from a few weeks to several months. Based on analysis of the surviving trance scrolls, as well as murals and friezes from Alessian temples, I estimate that the Alessian Order actually lasted only about 150 years, rather than the famous “one thousand and eight years” given by the Encyclopedia Tamrielica. The “mystery” of the millennia-plus rule of the Alessians was accepted but unexplained until the spread of the Lorkhan cults in the late 3rd era, when the doctrine of the Dragon Break took hold. Because this dating (and explanation) was so widely held at the time, and then repeated by historians down through today, it has come to have the force of tradition. Recall, however, that the 3rd era historians were already separated from the Alessians by a gulf of more than 2,000 years. And history was still in its infancy, relying on the few archives from those early days.

Today, modern archaeology and paleonumerology have confirmed what my own research in Alessian dating first suggested: that the Dragon Break was invented in the late 3rd era, based on a scholarly error, fuelled by obsession with eschatology and Numidivism, and perpetuated by scholarly inertia.
Dragon Language: Myth no More

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. There are images in the book that I couldn't put in here so where it says the characters are it's just going to skip to the next sentence.

Dragon Language: Myth no More

by Hela Thrice-Versed

Dragon.

The very word conjures nightmare images of shadowed skies, hideous roaring, and endless fire. Indeed, the dragons were terrifying beasts that were once as numerous as they were powerful and deadly.

But what most Nords don’t realise is that the dragons were not in fact simple, mindless beasts. Indeed, they were a thriving, intelligent culture, one bent on the elimination or enslavement of any non-dragon civilisation in the entire world.

It therefore stands to reason that the dragons would require a way to communicate with one another. That they would need to speak. And through much research, scholars have determined that this is exactly what the dragons did. For the mighty roars of the beasts, even when those roars contained fire, or ice, or some other deadly magic, were actually much more—they were words. Words in an ancient, though decipherable, tongue.

Nonsense, you say? Sheer folly on the part of some overeager academics? I thought precisely the same thing. But then I started hearing rumours. The odd snippet of conversation from some brave explorer or gold-coveting crypt diver. And always, always, it was the same word repeated: Wall.

So I listened more. I began to arrange the pieces of the puzzle, and slowly unravel the mystery.

Spread throughout Skyrim, in ancient dungeons, burial grounds, and other secluded places, there are walls. Black, ominous walls on which is written a script so old, so unknown, none who had encountered it could even begin its translation.

In my heart, I came to know the truth: this was proof of the ancient dragon language! For what else could it possibly be? It only made sense that these walls were constructed by the ancient Nords, Nords who had lived in the time of the dragons, and out of fear or respect, had somehow learned and used the language of the ancient beasts.

But at that point, all I had was my own gut instinct. What I needed was proof. Thus began the adventure of my life. One spanning 17 months and the deaths of three courageous guides and two sellsword protectors. But I choose not to dwell on those grim details, for the end result was so glorious, it made any hardship worth it.

In my travels, I found many of the ancient walls, and every suspicion proved true.
It did in fact appear as if the ancient Nords had copied the language of the dragons of old, for the characters of that language very much resembled claw marks, or scratches. One can almost envision a majestic dragon using his great, sharp talons to carve the symbols into the stone itself. And a human witness—possibly even a thrall or a slave—learning, observing, so that he too could use the language for his own ends.

For as I observed the walls I found, I noticed something peculiar about some of the words. It was if they pulsed with a kind of power, an unknown energy that, if unlocked, might be harnessed by the reader. That sounds like nonsense, I know, but if you had stood by these walls—seen their blackness, felt their power—you would understand that of which I speak.

Thankfully, although entranced, I was able to retain enough sense to actually transcribe the characters I saw. And, in doing so, I began to see a pattern in the language—patterns that allowed me to decipher what it was I was reading.

For example, I transcribed the following passage:

Assigning those scratchings to actual Tamrielic language characters, I further translated what I saw into this: Het nok Yngnavar Gaaf-Kodaav, wo drey Yah moron au Frod do Krosis, nuz sinon siiv dinok ahrk dukaan.

Which translates into Tamrielic as follows: Here lies Yngnavar Ghost-Bear, who did Seek glory on the Battlefield of Sorrows, but instead found death and dishonour.

Then, in another crypt, I encountered a wall with this transcription:

Which translates into: Het nok kopraan do Iglif Iiz-Sos, wo grind ni ko morokei vukein, nuz ahst munax haalvut do liiv krasaar.

Which ultimately translates into: Here lies the body of Iglif Ice-Blood, who met his end not in glorious combat, but at the cruel touch of the withering sickness.

And there you see the pattern. The repeated words “Here lies”—which could only mean one thing: those walls marked actual ancient Nord burial grounds.

You can imagine my nearly uncontainable excitement. It all started to make sense. The ancient Nords used the dragon language for these walls for very specific reasons. One of them was obviously to mark the grave of some important figure. But what else? Were they all graves, or did they serve other purposes as well?

I set off to find out, and was well rewarded for my efforts. Here is what I discovered.

This passage:

Translate into this: Het mah tahrodiis tafiir Skorji Lun-Sinak, wen klov govey naal rinik hahkun rok togaat wah gahrot.

Which in Tamrielic translates into this: Here fell the treacherous thief Skorji Leech-Fingers, whose head was removed by the very axe he was attempting to steal.

So here we see a wall that marks where some significant ancient Nord died.

This passage:

Translates into this: Qethsegol vahrulkiv daanik Fahliil kiir do Gravuun Frod, wo bovul ko Maar
nol kinzon zahkrii do kruziik hokoron.

Which in Tamrielic translates into this: This stone commemorates the doomed elf children of the Autumn Field, who fled in Terror from the sharp swords of the ancient enemy.

This wall seems to commemorate some ancient, long-forgotten event in Tamrielic history. Whether that event occurred on or near the place where the wall was erected, we will probably never know.

And finally, this passage:

Which translates into this: Aesa wahaan qethsegol brijahii vahrukt, Thohild fin Toor, wen smoliin ag frin ol Sahqo Heim.

Which in Tamrielic translates into this: Aesa raised this stone for her sister, Thohild the Inferno, whose passion burned hot as the Red Forge.

This wall (and I encountered quite a few like this) was obviously commissioned or built by a specific person, to honour someone important to them. What was the significance of the location? Was it important to the person who died? Or is it the actual location of that person’s death? Again, those answers are probably lost to time, and will never be known.

And so you see, the ancient dragon language is, indeed, myth no more. It existed. But better yet, it still exists, and probably will until the end of time, thanks to the ancient Nords and their construction of these many “word walls”.

But don’t take my word for it. For the walls are there for the discovering, in Skyrim’s dangerous, secret places. They serve as a bridge between the realm of the ancient Nords, and our own. The dragons may never return to our world, but now we can return to theirs.

And someday, someday, we may even unlock the strange, unknown power hidden in their words.
The Dragon War

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for death and war.

The Dragon War

by Torhal Bjorik

In the Merethic Era, when Ysgramor first set foot on Tamriel, his people brought with them a faith that worshipped animal gods. Certain scholars believe these primitive people actually worshipped the divines as we know them, just in the form of these totem animals. They defied the hawk, wolf, snake, moth, owl, whale, and the dragon. Every now and then you can stumble across the broken stone totems in the farther reaches of Skyrim.

Foremost among all animals was the dragon. In the ancient Nordic tongue it was drah-gkon. Occasionally the term dov-rha is used, but the language or derivation of that is not known. Using either name was forbidden to all except the dragon priests. Grand temples were built to honour the dragons and appease them. Many of them survive today as ancient ruins haunted by draugr and undead dragon priests.

Dragons, being dragons, embraced their role as god-kings over men. After all, were they not fashioned in Akatosh’s own image? Were they not superior in every way to the hordes of the small, soft creatures that worshipped them? For dragons, power equals truth. They had the power, so therefore it must be true. Dragons granted small amounts of power to the dragon priests in exchange for absolute obedience. In turn, the dragon priests ruled men as their equals to the kings. Dragons, of course, could not be bothered with actually ruling.

In Atmora, where Ysgramor and his people came from, the dragon priests demanded tribute and set down laws and codes of living that kept peace between dragons and men. In Tamriel, they were not nearly as benevolent. It’s unclear if this was due to an ambitious dragon priest, or a particular dragon, or a series of weak kings. Whatever the cause, the dragon priests began to rule with an iron fist, making virtual slaves of the rest of the population.

When the populace rebelled, the dragon priests retaliated. When the dragon priests could not collect the tribute or control the masses, the dragons’ response was swift and brutal. So it was the Dragon War began.

At first, men died by the thousands. The ancient texts reveal that a few dragons took the side of men. Why they did this is not known. The priests of the Nine Divines claim it was Akatosh himself that intervened. From these dragons men learned magic to use against dragons. The tide began to turn and dragons began to die too.

The war was long and bloody. The dragon priests were overthrown and dragons were slaughtered in large numbers. The surviving dragons scattered, choosing to live in remote places away from men. The dragon cult itself adapted and survived. They built the dragon mounds, entombing the remains of dragons that fell in the war. They believed that one day the dragons would rise again and reward the faithful.
A Dream of Sovngarde

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

A Dream of Sovngarde

by Skardan Free-Winter

In a few hours, I will likely be dead.

My men and I, Nords of Skyrim and all, will soon join the Emperor’s legions to attack the Imperial City. The Aldmeri are entrenched within and our losses will be severe. It is a desperate gambit, for if we do not reclaim the city, we will lose the war.

Last night I prayed to the mighty Talos for courage and strength in the battle to come. In these last cold hours before the sun rises, I sit down to write this account of a dream I had not long after.

I believe this dream was the answer to my prayers, and I would pass along the wisdom it contained to my kinsmen, for the battles they will fight in the years after my passing.

In the dream, I walked through mist toward the sound of laughter, merriment and the songs of the north. The mist soon cleared, and before me lay a great chasm. Waters thundered over its brim, and so deep it was, I could not see the bottom.

A great bridge made all of whale-bone was the only means to cross, and so I took it.

It was only a few steps onto the bridge that I encountered a warrior, grim and strong. “I am Tsun, master of trials,” he said to me, his voice booming and echoing upon the walls of the high mountains all around us.

With a wave, he bade me pass on. I knew in my heart I was granted passage only because I was a visitor. Should the hour come when I return here after my mortal life, the legends say that I must beat this dread warrior in single combat.

Beyond the bridge, a great stone longhouse rose up before me, so tall as to nearly touch the clouds. Though it took all my strength, I pushed open the towering oaken door and beheld the torch-lit feast hall.

Here were assembled the greatest heroes of the Nords, all drinking mead poured from great kegs and singing battle-songs. Suckling pigs turned on a long iron spit over a roaring fire. My mouth watered at the smell of roast meat, and my heart was glad to hear the songs of old.

“Come forth!” cried out a hoary man who sat upon a high wooden chair. This I knew to be Ysgramor, father to Skyrim and the Nords. I approached and knelt before him.

“You find yourself in Sovngarde, hall of the honoured dead. Now, what would you have of me, son of the north?” he bellowed.
“I seek counsel,” said I, “for tomorrow we fight a desperate battle and my heart is full of fear.”

Ysgramor raised his tankard to his lips and drank until the cup was empty. Then he spoke once more.

“Remember this always, son of the north—a Nord is judged not by the manner in which he lived, but the manner in which he died.”

With that, he cast aside his flagon, raised his fist in the air and roared a great cheer. The other heroes rose to their feet and cheered in answer.

The sound still rang in my ears when I awoke. I gathered my men and told them of my vision. The words seemed to fill their hearts with courage.

The horns are blowing, and the banners are raised. The time has come to muster. May Talos grant us victory this day, and if I am worthy, may I once again look upon the great feast hall.

— Skardan Free-Winter
Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for mentions of death.

For a thousand years, the Priests of Vaermina have been masters of the art of alchemy. The complexity and potency of their mixtures are nothing short of legendary. These alchemical treasures are so highly sought-after, that a single draught showing up on the black market can command sums in the tens of thousands of septims.

Of the numerous potions that have surfaced to date, Vaermina’s Torpor is perhaps the most impressive. A single sip of this viscous liquid places the imbibers in a state known as “The Dreamstride”. This condition allows the subject to experience the dreams of another as if they were actually there. The subject becomes an integral part of the dream, behaving as if they belong. To any other entities in this dream state, the subject will be mistaken for the dreamer; the subject will even find his mannerisms, speech patterns, and knowledge expanded appropriately.

To an observer, after the subject has imbibed the potion, they will appear to vanish. As the subject traverses distances within the dream, they will also traverse distances in the actual world. When the torpor’s effect has expired, the subject will fade back into reality in the exact location within the Dreamstride. Some Dreamstriders have transported a few feet, and some have appeared thousands of miles from their origin in a matter of minutes.

It’s to be noted that the Dreamstride is highly dangerous and presents the subject with numerous pitfalls. In certain dreams, subjects have been exposed to life-threatening scenarios such as sickness, violence and even death. In most cases, the subject simply fades back into our world without harm, but in some instances, the subject never reappeared and was assumed to have expired or the subject reappeared deceased. It’s also quite possible that the subject could appear in a precarious or hazardous location in reality, even though that location appeared safe within the Dreamstride.

Vaermina’s Torpor is as mysterious and elusive as the priests that created it. It’s unknown whether this unique transport mechanism is a result of the Torpor itself or simply the odd machinations of Vaermina, but the potential for using the dreamstride to penetrate seemingly impassible obstacles certainly outweighs its mysterious nature.
The Dunmer of Skyrim

by Athal Sarys

“Dunmer.”

That is our name. Yet you deny us even this courtesy. You, and the white-skinned, jaundice-haired apes of this godsforsaken frozen wilderness. To you Nords, we are they grey ones, the ashen-skinned, the “dark elves” of Morrowind who have as much place in your land as an infection in an open wound.

Oh yes, we have read your great cultural work, “Nords of Skyrim,” in which you extol the many virtues of your people and province, and invite any visitors to come experience your homeland for themselves. Well come we did, Nords, and the reception was less than was promised—but exactly what we expected.

So I, Atal Sarys [sic], Dunmer and immigrant to Skyrim, have decided to answer your beloved book with a work of my own. And let all who read it know that Nords are not the only race to reside in this cold and inhospitable realm. For we dark elves have come, and little by little, shall claim Skyrim as our own.

But where, you may ask, have we taken up residence? Why none other than the ancient city of Windhelm, once the capital of the First Empire. Yes, Nords, in the shadow of your own Palace of the Kings, where the Nord hero Ysgramor once held court, we now now thrive. Oh yes. Your beloved Five Hundred Companions may have driven our ancestors from Skyrim, but that was then. This is now.

Indeed, one might be surprised as to just how well we’ve settled into Windhelm. The district once known as the Snow Quarter is thus named no more. Now, they call it the Grey Quarter, for such is the reality of the Dunmer occupation. The district is now populated entirely by my kind, a victory not lost on its residents.

Oh, but the peaceful occupation goes even further. Thirsty? You’ll find no Nord mead hall in the Grey Quarter. But the spirits flow well enough in the New Gnisis Cornerclub. Seeking a respected family? You’ll find no Grey-Manes within these walls. But perhaps you’d like to pay a visit to the home of Belyn Hlaalu, descendant of one of the most noble houses in all of Morrowind. Ah, but no. You Nords don’t come to the Grey Quarter, do you? You far our streets as you fear our skin.

So now, “children of Skyrim,” you have the truth of it. You may call this province home, but you can no sooner claim to own it than a cow can claim to own its master’s field. you are just another breed of domestic animal, grazing stupidly while higher beings plot your slaughter.
Dwarves, v1

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Dwarves, The Lost Race of Tamriel, Volume I:
Architecture and Designs

by Calcelmo, Scholar of Markarth

Let me begin by correcting a common misconception. The proper term to use when referencing the ancient lost race of Tamriel is “Dwemer”. It is a word whose meaning is roughly translated to “people of the deep” in the common tongue, and whose use has been widely replaced by the more ubiquitous nomenclature, “dwarves”. I would like stated that I use the name “dwarves” in lieu of the more accurate term in these books out of sympathy for my readership, whom I can safely assume does not have the breadth of scholarship that 200 years of study has given me.

With that small point finished, let us begin our discussion on the dwarves by focusing on the indisputable artefacts they have left behind: their architectural and cultural designs. Unlike the more controversial areas of dwarven scholarship, the construction of dwarven cities and relics are well-founded due to the plethora of samples taken from the Ruin these people have left behind. My own home city, Markarth, was originally one such ruin, and I can state from first-hand experience that all dwarven designs share a set of common principles that we can use to determine true artefacts from fakes and delineate patterns and methodologies that were important to their craftsmen.

First of all, we can say for certain that dwarven artisans favoured stone, at least as far as their buildings were concerned. This is no surprise. With notable exceptions, the vast majority of dwarven architecture is found underground or carved out of mountains. It is possible, although only theoretically, that the dwarves first mastered masonry as a race quite early, and later examples of metalwork were added on to much earlier stone designs as the dwarves began to master more complex tools. Regardless, the foundation of all known dwarven ruins is built on stonework, and the structure of dwarven stonework is sharp, angular and intensely mathematical in nature.

By a simple count, there are hundreds if not thousands of samples of dwarven buildings made of precise square shapes, and far fewer examples of discretely rounded or curved stonework, leading us to believe that early dwarves favoured trusted, well-calculated designs based on angled lines rather than riskier, more imprecise calculations based on arcs and curves. This comparatively simple tradition of stoncutting has nevertheless resulted in buildings that are as structurally sound today as they were hundreds of years ago, making the works of our most skilled masons today seem like child’s play.

Metalwork as far as we know is the primary method used to make almost all dwarven crafts. We cannot, however, discount more easily destructible materials such as clay, paper, and glass from outside the scope of dwarven craftsmanship, but given the tendency of dwarven design to favour the long-lasting over the fragile, we can safely assume that at the very least metal was a heavy preference. And the metal used in all so-far-discovered dwarven relics is entirely unique to their
No other race has replicated whatever process was used to create dwarven metal. Although it can be easily mistaken for bronze—and in fact many forgers of dwarven materials use bronze to create their fake replicas—it is most definitely a distinct type of metal on its own. I have personally seen metallurgists attempt to combine several different types of steel and common and rare ores in order to imitate dwarven metal’s exclusive properties, but the only method that has been successful is to melt down existing dwarven metallic scraps and start over from there.
Dwarves, v2

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Dwarves, The Lost Race of Tamriel, Volume II:
Weapons, Armour, and Machines

by Calcelmo, Scholar of Markarth

In our previous discussion on the dwarves (or “Dwemer” in the more correct, scholarly terminology), we looked into the properties of dwarven architecture and metallic craft. In this continued discussion of Tamriel’s Lost Race, we shall examine the ways in which dwarves waged war and kept out trespassers. Unlike many other cultures still existing today, the dwarves built and relied on increasingly complicated machines for a wide variety of martial tasks, and weapons and armour created solely for the purpose of being wielded by dwarven warriors show remarkably fewer points of progress beyond the basic designs.

Let us begin by analysing those basic weapons and armours. Anyone who has held a dwarven axe or worn a dwarven helmet can testify as to the ancient, ever-lasting quality of dwarven craftsmanship. Weapons do not deviate too greatly from their base function. Swords pierce through light armours with incredible effectiveness, owing primarily to the remarkable sharpness of tempered dwarven metal, and owing to a far lesser extent to its simple, double-edged design.

Compare and contrast a sharp, angular dwarven dagger to a curved elven blade, and it becomes a small logical leap to say that dwarven weaponsmiths relied almost exclusively on creating quality materials first, and merely allowed the form of those materials to flow from the method that weapon was intended to kill people.

As a culture that built almost exclusively underground, it’s no surprise that dwarven armours are built to withstand incredibly heavy blows. Again, the fact that they are also resistant to being pierced by arrows or small blades is more of a testament to superior dwarven metallurgy over superior dwarven armoursmithing, but it would be erroneous to thus conclude that dwarven smiths did not take the manufacture of their weapons and armour very seriously. Every piece of war crafts I have examined show a remarkable amount of necessary detailing and personalisation that is just as evident today among the most ardent blacksmiths.

A dwarven smith probably came from a long tradition of that distinguished itself in a way that, say, the grip of a mace would fell, or the design of the head of individual arrows. Although, due to the paltry lack of any cultural artefacts outside the weapons and armours themselves, this is only mere speculation.

The last, but probably most important discussion in this volume, pertains to the existence of dwarven machinery. Dwarves created and manufactured on a very broad scale thousands of mechanical apparatuses of varying complexity. The most simple of which is the standard “arachnid” design used to ward off trespassers. We are so far uncertain as to how the dwarves were able to bring to life these remarkably intelligent machines, but I have only witnessed one stalk a
highly trained thief for hours, only to ambush him as he was dealing with a lock to some room or
treasure trove—I admit to have forgotten the details past the point at which it began spouting
lightning at him.

Dwarven military machines also range from the human-sized “Sphere” warrior, which patrols the
interiors of the ruins as a harmless ball only to emerge from it as a fully armed and armoured
automaton fighter, to the justly feared “Centurion” whose height ranges from twice to several
times human size depending on which reports you believe.
Dwarves, The Lost Race of Tamriel, Volume III: Culture and History

by Calcelmo, Scholar of Markarth

In this final volume on our discussion of the dwarves (again, see the term “Dwemer” for references using the more scholastic name), we will attempt an examination into the distinct culture and history of Tamriel’s Lost Race. We must, however, begin such a discussion with a warning. Despite what certain academic circles would like people to believe, there is so far no evidence that verifies any claim as to the dwarves’ particular customs, morals, myths, legends, laws, systems of governance, or involvement in major historical events outside of those few examples that remain indisputable.

For instance, while we can say with absolute certainty that the disappearance of the entire dwarven race happened very suddenly, only the laziest of junior scholars would say that this event happened in the same day or even the same hour. There is simply no proof to dispute the theory that perhaps the dwarves disappeared from Tamriel gradually over the course of several years or even several decades.

There is also nothing that disproves the source of this disappearance as being attributed to mass deaths, plagues, magical contamination, experiments into the nature of Aetherius gone wrong, or even race-wide teleportation into one of the planes of Oblivion. There is simply too little that the dwarves left behind that points to the nature of their great vanishing act, and this same frustration applies to all aspects of their social structure and history.

What we know then can only be inferred by the writings of the other races which made contact with the dwarves before they left Tamriel. The dark elves (“Dunmer”) for example teach that their great prophet Nerevar helped unite the dwarves and the elves in Morrowind against occupying Nords from Skyrim in the First Era, but Nord and Orc writings also indicate that dwarves were also allied with them at various points and in various legendary battles of theirs.

Unfortunately, none of these legends and folk lore make an effort to describe the dwarves in great detail, only that they were a secretive people and that an alliance with them was unusual enough to warrant crafting a story around. And past the First Era, no race makes note of encountering any living dwarves at all. This is further confounded by the fact that so many of the dark elven writings on their relationship with the dwarves were lost during during the tragic eruptions of Vvardenfell during the Oblivion Crisis nearly 200 years ago. What secrets they could have revealed about the Lost Race are now buried behind layers of molten earth along with so many unfortunate dark elven people.

Thus, we conclude our discussion on the dwarves on a somber note. As with all scholarly endeavours, we are left with more questions than we have answers, and the proof we so
desperately search for is so often out of reach, denied even to the most fervent effort.

The mysteries the dwarves have left us with could easily warrant another century or so worth of personal examination from me, and quite possibly even several millennia of excavation of even on dwarven ruin would be insufficient to paint a complete picture on them. But what we can see from our threadbare tapestry of dwarven artefacts is a careful, intelligent, industrious, and highly advanced culture whose secrets we as students and teachers of their works can only hope to uncover someday.
Collected Essays on Dwemer History and Culture
Chapter 1

by Hasphat Antabolis

Marobar Sul and the Trivialisation
of the Dwemer in Popular Culture

by Hasphat Antabolis

While Marobar Sul’s Ancient Tales of the Dwemer was definitively debunked in scholarly circles as early as the reign of Katariah I, it remains one of the staples of the literate middle-classes of the Empire, and has served to set the image of the Dwemer in the popular imagination for generations of schoolchildren. What about this lengthy (but curiously insubstantial) tome has proved so captivating to the public that it has been able to see off both the scorn of the literati and the scathing critiques of the scholars?

Before examining this question, a brief summary of the provenance and subsequent career of Ancient Tales would be appropriate. First published around 2E670, in the interregnum between the fall of the First Cyrodiilic Empire and the rise of Tiber Septim, it was originally presented as a serious, scholarly work based on research in the archives of the University of Gwylim, and in the chaos of that era was taken at face value (a sign of the sad state of Dwemer scholarship in those years). Little is known of the author, but Marobar Sul was most likely a pseudonym Gor Felim, a prolific writer of “penny dreadful romances” of that era, who is known to have used many other pseudonyms. While most of Felim’s work has, thankfully, been lost to history, what little survives matches Ancient Tales in both language and tone (see Lomis, “Textual Comparison of Gor Felim’s A Hypothetical Treachery with Marobar Sul’s Ancient Tales of the Dwemer”). Felim lived in Cyrodiil his whole life, writing light entertainments for the elite of the old Imperial capital. Why he decided to turn his hand to the Dwemer is unknown, but it is clear that his “research” consisted of nothing more than collecting the peasants’ tales of the Nibenay Valley and recasting them in Dwemer guise.

The book proved popular in Cyrodiil, and Felim continued to churn out more volumes until the series numbered seven in all. Ancient Tales of the Dwemer was thus firmly established as a local favourite in Cyrodiil (already in its 17th printing) when the historical forces that propelled Tiber Septim to prominence also began to spread the literature of the “heartland” across the continent.
Marobar Sul’s version of the Dwemer was seized upon in a surge of human racial nationalism that has not yet subsided.

The Dwemer appear in these tales as creatures of fable and light fantasy, but in general they are “just like us”. They come across as a bit eccentric, perhaps, but certainly there is nothing fearsome or dangerous about them. Compare these to the Dwemer of early Redguard legend: a mysterious, powerful race, capable of bending the very laws of nature to their will; vanishing but perhaps not gone. Or the Dwemer portrayed in most Nord sagas: fearsome warriors, tainted by blasphemous religious practices, who used their profane mechanisms to drive the Nords from Morrowind. Marobar Sul’s Dwemer were much more amenable to the spirit of the time, which saw humans as the pinnacle of creation and the other races as unenlightened barbarians or imperfect, lesser versions of humans eager for tutelage. Ancient Tales falls firmly in the latter camp, which does much to explain its enduring hold on the popular imagination. Marobar Sul’s Dwemer are so much more comfortable, so much friendlier, so much more familiar, than the real Dwemer, whose truly mysterious nature we are only beginning to understand. The public prefers the light, trivial version of this vanished race. And from what I have learned in my years of studying the Dwemer, I have some sympathy for that preference. As the following essays will show, the Dwemer were, to our modern eyes, a remarkably unlikeable people in many ways.
Dwemer Inquiries Vol I

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Dwemer Inquiries Vol I

by Thelwe Ghelein

Dwemer Inquiries Vol I
Their Architecture and Civilisation

by
Thelwe Ghelein, Scholar

In the Deep Halls, far from Men
Forsaken Red Mountain, Twisted Kin
Hail the Mind, Hail the Stone
Dwarven Pride, Stronger than bone

It has been my life’s work to investigate the Dwemer, their dubious history and mysterious banishment. My goal with this text is to share my findings and conclusions based on eighty years spent studying their unique architectural remains.

The Migration of the Deep-Elves from their ancestral Dwemereth, now Morrowind, is a generally accepted fact. Recorded history supports this, specifically mentioning the Rourken Clan’s refusal to join King Dumac in the forming of the First Council, and their subsequent exodus to Hammerfell. The architectural premise is also sound, as the building habits of the Dwarves adapted and changed, albeit slowly and in subtle ways, over time and land. I propose that some of these differences are stylistic as well as practical.

Traditional viewpoints suggest that the Vvardenfell Dwemer were the most prolific of their kind. Based on my excavations throughout Skyrim, Morrowind and High Rock, I am not sure that this is the case. While Vvardenfell is almost cluttered with dwarven ruins poking through the surface of the landscape, the construction of those ruins is fundamentally different from the majority of what I’ve observed elsewhere.

Further, as we delve into Vvardenfell ruins, we notice that their internal structure is quite different. While major civic and operational chambers are found near the surface in a Vvardenfell Ruin, that is typically not the case on the mainland. Minor passageways and storehouse rooms are near the surface, but more important don’t occur until we explore much deeper.

Because such major locations are well-hidden in Dwemer Ruins outside of Morrowind, many scholars believed they were in fact not present in ruins outside that province. This premature conclusion led some to believe such sites to be mere outposts. My research has shown this not to be the case.

There are a few theories that may explain this difference. Perhaps Clan architects simply had their
own styles and preferences when it came to civic planning. This seems only somewhat likely, as Dwarven techniques were based on empirical study, there was likely little room for creative interpretation when it came to building technique. Geological makeup of the terrain almost certainly played a role, especially in a region like Northern Skyrim where the ground near the surface is very rocky and often frozen, versus the volcanic substratum common in Vvardenfell or the ubiquitous aquifers found in Hammerfell. It’s possible that Dwarven architects in the North were not even able to excavate larger structures until reaching more pliable stratum.

This scholar would like to suggest, however, that many structures west of Morrowind were built after 1E420. When the Clan Rourken left Vvardenfell, it seems evident that several clans broke off to create their own settlements, and chose to live in greater isolation than their Eastern brethren. This theory is particularly fascinating, because it leads me to believe that Dwarven architects may have developed even more elaborate methods of hiding their strongholds over time.

This opens the distinct possibility that undisturbed dwarven archaeological sites exist throughout Tamriel, even in southern areas like Cyrodiil or Black Marsh where Dwarves are not believed to have ever had a significant presence. Though we ought not get carried away on flights of fancy, one could extrapolate this logic to suggest that some Dwarven Clans were living among us for much longer than previously believed, perhaps well beyond the disappearance during the War of the Red Mountain in 1E700.
Thanks for reading and reviewing.

In the Deep Halls, far from Men
Forsaken Red Mountain, Twisted Kin
Hail the Mind, Hail the Stone
Dwarven Pride, Stronger than bone

The limited written record supports the perception Deep Elves as culturally revering the pursuits of logic and science. This stands in stark contrast to the belief system of most other mer cultures. When we imagine a society structured around such a central ideology, it seems reasonable that prolific scholars, especially in fields such as mathematics, metallurgy or architecture, would be elevated to social status like that of clergy in a more mystically-inclined culture. The idea is supported by a fragment of Dwemeris text recovered from a colony in Skyrim—Irkgnthand—which I believed to be associated with the Clan Rourken. The original Dwemeris and my translation Follow:


“To raise granted-cousin Cuolec of privilege with duties for family-home building Hoagen Kultorra<?> tradition to father Mundus shaper.”

Some scholars interpret this as evidence of Dwemer worship of Mundus, but I do not agree. My translation of this passage suggests that a respected Dwemer by the name Cuolec was promoted to a civic position, probably tonal architect. The latter half of the fragment suggests that Cuolec’s position requires him to build in a specific style.

The term Hoagen Kultorra has thus far eluded me, but I believe it may be the name of such a style. It’s possible there were several styles, differing in their construction principles and typical structures.

One earmark of what I believe was the prevalent Dwemer style among Northern clans was a feature I call the Deep Venue. Deep Venues are often characterised as being made up of one or more expansive natural caverns in which several other structures will occur. Structures within the Venue may be carved from the stone itself, or freely erected upon the cavern floor. The largest and
most impressive Venues, such as that found in Bthardamz, may even feature roads wide enough for ten large men to walk shoulder-meets-shoulder along it.

Arcanex are typically smaller structures. Very few have been properly studied before disruption by grave-robbers or greedy adventurers, but those few undisturbed sites have contained a surprising collection of magical objects such as soul-gems, alchemical concoctions and magical texts. Some scholars take these as evidence that the Dwemer did, in fact, dabble in the magical arts. Based on what we know of their culture, as well as the fact that most arcanex are minor structures compared to their common fixtures, I would suggest that these were centres of study and nothing more. Perhaps the Dwarves established these Halls as a means to study man and mer, who surely seemed as alien to them as the Dwemer seem to us today?

Great Animonculorotories can be found in many Dwarven strongholds. These were the factories where the centurions and various other constructs were built. I have hoped to study these chambers for clues as to the means by which those mysterious automata are given life, but those same guardians make these especially difficult and dangerous areas to explore.
Dwemer Inquiries Vol III

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Dwemer Inquiries Vol III

by Thelwe Ghelein

My studies, and this text, have focused heavily on the fact that Dwemer archaeological sites west of Vvardenfell seem to be built at much greater depths than their counterparts near the Red Mountain. I believe there was a specific threshold to which Dwarven excavators would dig before the construction of vital structures would begin.

I have referred to this threshold as the “Geocline”, but I have found that to often be redundant with the Deep Venue of a colony. Still, there is some variation in the actual depth of a Deep Venue, whereas the Geocline is always the marker where I reason the City proper begins.

Tunnels and chambers at shallow depths, while often grand in their architectural style, appear to have served little in the way of civic purpose. Surplus stores of food, warehouse chambers that may have been used in trading with nearby surface settlements, or barracks for topside patrols are common above the Geocline.

These tunnels, I have observed, can meander in a seemingly more random pattern than those planned structures beneath. I hypothesise that this may be due to the unpredictable nature of an excavation, even to a race as clever as the Dwemer. Surely unexpected deposits of stone or geological events could make the effort difficult, and I think that these haphazard tunnels are often the result of the search for suitable substratum to build within.

I have found in a small number of ruins reference to a geological anomaly or place known as “Fal’Zhardum Din”. This is intriguing because the term not only appears in a few tablet fractions, but specifically on ornate metal frames in the deepest reaches of the Strongholds Alftand, Irkngthand and Mzinchaleft of Skyrim. I have yet to decipher the meaning of these elaborate carvings, but consider it highly strange that they occur in the deepest part of each of these ruins.

The most reasonable translation of “Fal’Zhardum Din” I have managed to decipher is “Blackest Kingdom Reaches”, but I cannot imagine what that means.

I suspect there may be some pattern I am failing to notice. This creeping doubt has haunted my career in recent years, and I have begun to doubt if I will unravel some grand secret of the Dwarves in my lifetime, though it lies just under my nose—or indeed, under my feet.
Effects of the Elder Scrolls

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Effects of the Elder Scrolls

by Justinius Poluhnius

It is widely known among scholars that the Elder Scrolls entail a certain hazard in their very reading. The mechanism of the effect has, at present, been largely unknown— theories of hidden knowledge and divine retribution were the subject of idle speculation with little investigation.

I, Justinius Poluhnius, have undertaken to thoroughly document the ailments afflicted by the Elder Scrolls on their readers, though a unified theory of how they manifest continues to elude me and remains a subject for future study.

I have grouped the effects into four, finding that the avenue of experience depends largely upon the mind of the reader. If this is unclear, I hope that a proper dichotomy will lay it plain.

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Group the First: The Naifs

For one who has received no training in the history or nature of the Elder Scrolls, the scroll itself is, effectively, inert. No prophecy can be scried nor knowledge obtained. While the scroll will not impart learning to the uninformed, nor will it afflict them in any adverse fashion. Visually, the scroll will appear to be awash in odd lettering and symbols. Those who know their astronomy often claim to recognise constellations in the patterns and connections, but such conjecture is impossible to further investigate since the very nature of this study necessitates unlearned subjects.

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Group the Second: The Unguarded Intellects

It is this second group that realises the greatest danger from attempting to read the scrolls. These are subjects who have an understanding of the nature of the Elder Scrolls and possess sufficient knowledge to actually read what is inscribed there. They have not, however, developed adequate discipline to stave off the mind-shattering effect of having a glimpse of infinity. These unfortunate souls are struck immediately, irrevocably, and completely blind. Such is the price for overreaching one’s faculties. It bears mentioning, though, that with the blindness also comes a fragment of that hidden knowledge—whether the future, past, or the deep natures of being is dependent on the individual and their place in the greater spheres. But the knowledge does come.

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Group the Third: Mediated Understanding

Alone in Tamriel, it would appear that only the Cult of the Ancestor Moth has discovered the discipline to properly guard one’s mind when reading the scrolls. Their noviciates must undergo the most rigorous mental cultivation, and they often spend a decade or more at the monastery
before being allowed to read their first Elder Scroll. The monks say this is for the initiates’ own protection, as they must have witnessed many Unguarded Intellects among their more eager ranks. With appropriate fortitude, these readers also receive blindness, though at a far lesser magnitude than the Unguarded. Their vision fogs slightly, but they retain shape, colour, and enough acuity to continue to read mundane texts. The knowledge they gain from the scroll is also tempered somewhat—it requires stages of meditation and reflection to fully appreciate and express what one saw.

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**Group the Fourth: Illuminated Understanding**

Between the previous group and this one exists a continuum that has, at present, only been traversed by the monks of the Ancestor Moth. With continued readings the monks become gradually more and more blind, but receive greater and more detailed knowledge. As they spend their waking hours pondering the revelations, they also receive a further degree of mental fortitude. There is, for every monk, a day of Penultimate Reading, when the only knowledge the Elder Scroll imparts is that the monk’s next reading shall be his last.

For each monk the Penultimate Reading comes at a different and unknowable time—preliminary work has been done to predict the occurrence by charting the severity of an individual monk’s blindness, but all who reach these later stages report that the increasing blindness seems to taper with increased readings. Some pose the notion that some other, unseen, sense is, in fact, continuing to diminish at this upper range, but I shall leave such postulations to philosophers.

To prepare for his Ultimate Reading, a monk typically withdraws to seclusion in order to reflect upon a lifetime of revelations and appoint his mind for reception of his last. Upon this final reading, he is forever blinded as sure as those Unguarded ones who raced to knowledge. The Illuminated one, though, has retained his understanding over a lifetime and typically possesses a more integral notion of what has been revealed to him.

It is hoped that this catalogue will prove useful to those who wish to further our mortal understanding of the Elder Scrolls. The Moth Priests remain aloof about these matters, taking the gradual debilitation that comes with reading as a point of pride. May this serve as a useful starting point for those hoping to take up such study.

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Dictated to Anstius Metchim, 4th Last Seed in the 126th year of the Second Era.
Eisa's Journal

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Eisa’s Journal

Left the White River gang this morning, with Hajvarr’s thugs on our tail. Wasn’t a bad gig, but it was time to move on. Ra’jirr and I weren’t getting anywhere with him in charge.

I’ll never understand how he does it. I couldn’t find so much as a rumour in Windhelm, while Ra’jirr stayed outside the city, got wasted on Moonsugar, and still managed to find us a lead—some gang out Morthal way. They’re holed up in an old ruin, digging it out between raids on the caravans.

Joined up with Kyr’s band. Their treasure-hunting dig is a disaster: three months of work have barely cleared a single hall, and six men have died in the cave-ins. I’ve taken charge of the dig, while Ra’jirr is leading the raids topside. Maybe that year in Cidhna Mine will pay off after all.

You’d think a man who could swing a sword could use a pickaxe, but these louts are exhausted after barely an hour. No wonder this tunnel’s taking forever. I’ve set up round-the-clock shifts, and ordered double rations for the best diggers. That’ll give them some incentive.

Night shift woke me to say they’d hit something big. Kyr, Ra’jirr, and I went down to take a look. It’s huge, like a whole forest was just swallowed up by the earth, with a big old monument out in the centre. Kyr took the sword from it as a trophy, proof his whole plan was finally paying off. For once, he might be right.

Ra’jirr’s been having nightmares over the past few days. He keeps muttering about a “Pale Lady”—one of those swamp women who steal children away at night, I think. To think some fool story could turn the toughest bandit I know into a cowering kitten, frightened of his own shadow. I’m just glad none of the others see him like this.

It’s getting worse. Ra’jirr can barely sleep at all now, and whenever he dozes off, he wakes up screaming—woke the whole place last night. He says the “Pale Lady” is coming for us—she’s down in the forest, we have to return the sword or she’ll kill us all. Not a chance—the boss clings to that thing like he was born with it. I’ve told everyone Ra’jirr just has a fever, but this can’t go on. I’ve pulled a few things together. I’ll slip out tonight and never look back.
A Primer on Enchanting

by Sergius Turrianus

Enchanting was raised to a fine art by the wizards of the Arcane University. Sadly, some of the nuances of the skill were lost when the Imperial City was sacked. Yet we are not without capability. This text will cover only the basics of Enchanting. It is but a primer for students of the College of Winterhold.

Before a weapon or a bit of armour can be enchanted, the wizard must first learn the enchantment. This is a personal task. Enchantments cannot easily be passed from one mage to another. They must be understood at a primal level that can only be achieved by destroying an enchanted item and absorbing its nature.

The Arcane Enchanter is specifically designed for this task. Merely place an enchanted item in the device and will it to relent. The magic will flow into the mage, imbuing him with the knowledge of how the enchantment is formed. The utter destruction of the enchanted item is the unavoidable consequence of this process.

Items that already have enchantments cannot be enchanted further, so choose carefully when you enchant a blade or helmet. Before beginning an enchantment, make sure you have a filled soul gem. The enchantment will use this soul as a source of power. Place the item and the soul gem on the Arcane Enchanter. Concentrate on the enchantment. The device will meld the two together, enchanting your weapon or armour.

Armour enchantment are permanent and do not need to be charged or powered. The reasons for this are not known. Some in the College have postulated that wearer contributes small amounts of his own energy to keep the armour enchanted. Others say it is just the will of Magnus that it works that way. Regardless of the reason, enchanted armour and clothing never wear out.

Weapon enchantments are a different story. They slowly use the soul energy in them until they are depleted. The enchantment remains, but a filled soul gem must be used to recharge the weapon. Perhaps it is the destructive nature of the weapon enchantment that makes it deplete. One intriguing theory is that the soul leaks out a little at a time into the victim that the weapon harms. As a novice enchanter, the reason is immaterial.

At first you will find that your enchantments require a lot of soul energy. As you become more skilled, you can achieve the same effect with less and less soul energy. So practice your lessons and pay heed to your masters in this magical arts.
Endrast's Journal

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Endrast’s Journal

The eyeless creatures took us in our sleep. I don’t know what happened to the Khajiit brothers, we never saw them in the cell. I managed to pick the lock and we made a break for it, but got split up. Sulla yelled something about not leaving without finding what he came here for and Umana chased after him.

Yag and I tried for the top of the cave shaft, but one of the ramps was broken. Without a hesitation, she grabbed me by the scruff of my tunic, threw me atop the ledge and told me to run.

And I did.

I didn’t even look back.

I just ran like a coward.

I could hear her fighting them and I just had to get away. I didn’t even notice the arrow in my shoulder till I hid here.

Those metal creatures are still all around me and I’m too terrified to move.

Eight Divines, please just take me now.
How foolish to move through this place so quickly. It’s taken me only a few hours to crack the back gate. Maybe I’ll donate a cup or two, but Krag says he knows some private buyers who will pay handsomely for a working trinket. There has to be one in here.

*****

The side doors are all locked, but this chest should have one or two things of value. When I get out I’m going to buy myself a castle.
The Exodus

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing. Trigger warnings for sickness, death, and necromancy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Exodus

by Waughin Jarth

Vralla was a little girl, beautiful and sweet-natured, beautiful and smart, beautiful and energetic. Everything that her parents had dreamed she would be. As perfect as she was, they could not help but have dreams for her. Her father, a bit of a social climber named Munthen, thought she would marry well, perhaps become a Princess of the Empire. Her mother, an insecure woman named Cinneta, thought she would reach greatness on her own, as a knight or a sorceress. As much as they wanted the very best for their daughter, they argued about what her fate would be, but both were wrong. Instead of growing up, she grew very ill.

The Temples told them to give up hope, and the Mages Guild told them that what afflicted Vralla was so rare, so deadly, that there was no cure. She was doomed to die, and soon.

When the great institutions of the Empire failed them, Munthen and Cinneta sought out the witches, the sorcerer hermits, and the other hidden, secret powers that lurk in the shadows of civilisation.

“I can think of only one place you can go,” said an old herbalist they found in the most remote peaks of the Wrothgarian Mountains. “The Mages Guild at Olenveld.”

“But we have already been to the Mages Guild,” said Munthen. “They couldn’t help us.”

“Go to Olenveld,” the herbalist insisted. “And tell no one that you’re going there.”

It was not easy to find Olenveld, as it did not appear on any modern map. In a bookseller’s in Skyrim, however, they found it in a historic book of cartography from the 2nd Era. In the yellowed pages, there was Olenveld, a city on an island in the northern coast, a day’s sail in summertide from Winterhold.

Bundling their pale daughter against the chill of the ocean wind, the couple set sail, using the old map as their only guide. For nearly two days, they were at sea, circling the same position, wondering if they were the victim of a cruel trick. And then they saw it.

In the midst of crashing waves were twin crumbling statues framing the harbour, long forgotten Gods or heroes. The ships within were half-sunk, rotting shells along the docks. Munthen brought his ship in, and the three walked into the deserted island city.

Taverns with broken windows, a plaza with a dried-up well, shattered palaces and fire-blackened tenements, barren shops and abandoned stables, all desolate, all still, but for the high keening ocean
wind that whistled through the empty places. And gravestones. Every road and alley was lined, and
crossed, and crossed again with memorials to the dead.

Munthen and Cinneta looked at one another. The chill they felt had little to do with the wind. Then
they looked at Vralla, and continued on to their goal—the Mages Guild of Olenveld.

Candlelight glistened through the windows of the great dark building, but it brought them little
relief to know that someone was alive in the island of death. They knocked on the door, and steeled
themselves against whatever horror they might face within.

The door was opened by a rather plump middle-aged Nord woman with frizzy blonde hair.
Standing behind her, a meek-looking bald Nord about her age, a sky teenage Breton couple, still
very pimply and awkward, and a very old, apple-cheeked Breton man who grinned with delight at
the visitors.

“Oh, my goodness,” said the Nord woman, all afluster. “I thought my ears must be fooling me
when I heard that door a-knockin’. Come in, come in, it’s so cold!”

The three were ushered in the door, and they were all relieved that the Guild did not look
abandoned in the least. It was well swept, well lit, and cheerfully decorated. The group fell into
introductions. The inhabitants of the Guildhouse in Olenveld were two families, the Nords Jalmar
and Nette, and the Bretons Lywel, Rosalyn, and old Wynster. They were friendly and
accomodating, immediately bringing some mulled wine and bread while Munthen and Cinneta
explained to them what they were doing there, and what the healers and herbalists had said about
Vralla.

“So, you see,” said Cinneta, tearfully. “We didn’t think we’d find the Mages Guild in Olenveld,
but now that we have, please, you’re our last hope.”

The five strangers also had tears in their eyes. Nette wept particularly noisily.

“Oh, you’ve been through too, too much,” the Nord woman bawled. “Of course, we’ll help. Your
little girl will be right as rain.”

“It is fair to tell you,” said Jalmar, more stoically, though he clearly was also touched by the tale.
“This is a Guildhouse, but we are not Mages. We took this building because it was abandoned and
it serves our purposes since the Exodus. We are Necromancers.”

“Necromancers?” Cinneta questioned. How could these nice people be anything so horrible?

“Yes, dear,” Nette smiled, patting her hand. “I know. We have a bad reputation, I’m afraid. Never
was very good, and now that well-meaning but foolish Archmagister Hannibal Traven—”

“May the Worm King eat his soul!” cried the old man quite suddenly and very viciously.

“Now, now, Wynster,” said the teenage girl Rosalyn, blushing and smiling at Cinneta
apologetically. “I’m sorry about him. He’s usually very sweet-mannered.”

“Well, of course, he’s right, Mannimarco will have the last say in the matter,” Jalmar said. “But
right now, it’s all very, well, akwward. When Traven officially banned the art, we had to go into
hiding. The only other option was to abandon it altogether, and that’s just foolish, though there are
many who have done it.”

“Not many people know about Olenveld anymore since Tiber Septim used it as his own personal
graveyard,” said Lywel. “Took us a week to find it again. But it’s perfect for us. Lots of dead
bodies, you know…”

“Lywel!” Rosalyn admonished him. “You’re going to scare them!”

“Sorry,” Lywel grinned sheepishly.

“I don’t care what you do here,” said Munthen sternly. “I just want to know what you can do for my daughter.”

“Well,” said Jalmar with a shrug. “I guess we can make it so she doesn’t die and is never sick again.”

Cinneta gasped, “Please! We’ll give you everything we have!”

“Nonsense,” said Nette, picking up Vralla in her big, beefy arms. “Oh, what a beautiful girl. Would you like to feel better, little sweetheart?”

Vralla nodded, wearily.

“You stay here,” Jalmar said. “Rosalyn, I’m sure we have something better than bread to offer these nice folks.”

Nette started to carry Vralla away, but Cinneta ran after her. “Wait, I’m coming too.”

“Oh, I’m sure you would, but it’d ruin the spell, dear,” Nette said. “Don’t worry about a thing. We’ve done this dozens of times.”

Munthen put his arms around his wife, and she relented. Rosalyn hurried off to the kitchen and brought some roast fowl and more mulled wine for them. They sat in silence and ate.

Wynster shuddered suddenly. “The little girl has died.”

“Oh!” Cinneta gasped.

“What in Oblivion do you mean?!” Munthen cried.

“Wynster, was that really necessary?” Lywel scowled at the old man, before turning to Munthen and Cinneta. “She had to die. Necromancy is not about curing a disease, it’s about resurrection, total regeneration, transforming the whole body, not just the parts that aren’t working now.”

Munthen stood up, angrily. “If those maniacs killed her—”

“They didn’t,” Rosalyn snapped, her shy eyes now showing fire. “Your daughter was on her last breath when she came in here, anyone could see that. I know that this is hard, horrible even, but I won’t have you call that sweet couple who are only trying to help you ‘maniacs’.”

Cinneta burst into tears, “But she’s going to live now? Isn’t she?”

“Oh yes,” Lywel said, smiling broadly.

“Oh, thank you, thank you,” Cinneta burst into tears. “I don’t know what we would have done—”

“I know how you feel,” said Rosalyn, patting Wynaster’s hand fondly. “When I thought we were going to lose him, I was willing to do anything, just like you.”

Cinneta smiled. “How old is your father?”
“My son,” Rosalyn corrected her. “He’s six.”

From the other room came the sound of tiny footsteps.

“Vralla, go give your parents a big hug,” said Jalmar.

Munthen and Cinneta turned, and the screaming began.

Chapter End Notes

I didn't understand the ending, so I'm guessing some of you don't understand it too. I looked up an explanation and I found these two comments on 'The Exodus Explained?' thread of the nexus forums.

Elendre: I figured they had to use a different body since the little girl's was so unhealthy and simply transferred the soul into whatever body they had available - might not have looked quite as nice as Vralla's original body :ermm: Roslyn's 6-year old son looked like an old man because it was an old man's body they transferred his soul into. That was my take on that story :wink:

Khorak: Considering the massive emphasis placed upon 'beautiful' in describing the child, it's likely that the Necromancers didn't raise the her in....quite the same physical condition. Think from the perspective of a Necromancer....they probably don't quite 'get it'. You already have to be a bit different from everyone else to be practising that kind of a magical art*, so I expect their perspective is one of preserving/restoring the life, which is what's truly precious, and they just don't understand all the other aspects. I imagine that Necromancers such as these guys (presuming they weren't being evil for the lulz and truly wanted to help) would restore someone as a fully functioning zombie and entirely fail to see the problem. They're alive. The soul and spark is there. What's wrong?

*I wouldn't write off Necromancy and Necromancers as entirely and intrinsically evil, but it’s not exactly a profession that's attracted the most morally robust people capable of maintaining an ethical outlook. Usually more the "conquer death, and then the world with a skeleton army" type.
Expedition Manifest

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

Expedition Manifest

by Sulla Trebatius

We’ve managed to secure the site and hold off any others who may try to steal our discoveries so far, especially those from the College of Winterhold, who seem to think the glory of exploring every ruin should be theirs alone.

The crew for our expedition is as follows:

Sulla Trebatius (myself) – Expedition leader

Umana – my constant companion and bodyguard

Valie – a mage not associated with the Winterhold (took some time to find)

Endrast – a fellow explorer of some local renown

Yag – a great brute of a woman, hired to keep the rest of the labour in check

J’darr and J’zhar – two Khajiit brothers, hired as labour

Need a couple more labourers, getting through the ice is proving difficult.

We’ve set up shelter and scouted the area. The small ruins on the lower plateau of the glacier don’t seem connected to the main structure and we haven’t managed to find a way into the tower parapet we’ve found here. Yag mentioned spotting a fissure in the glacial wall that may lead into the ruins so we are going to try find a way to get down there with the gear. Looks like a storm is coming.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!