

## Kastali's Diary – Late Winter, 435 Tz

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### **The Setting Sun** - Late Winter, Day 1

The spies of the Solonavi are rarely wrong. An agent secreted within the ranks of the Sunborn warriors of the scattered Galeshi alerted my masters that Raydan Marz is riding through the western mountains that edge the blighted wastes of the Blasted Lands, and seeking audience with a warleader of the desert tribes. While it took time to search Raydan's position out, I have discovered him and his band of warrior riders making their way up the steep, sand-blown switchbacks that lead to up to the heights of Jhegeri Pass.

Raydan Marz is a tall, handsome man, a Prieskan by birth, but a general and a statesman by nature. While he fights against the corruption of Emperor Nujarek, and is hunted by Atlantean troops throughout the Land, he still wears some of the trappings of his previous role as a commander in the armies of Atlantis. A manaclevt sword still hangs at his belt, though his lightning pistol is replaced by a black powder, wide-barreled weapon that looks as if it could blow a hole clean through a charging bear.

Behind him in the caravan line rides a number of other warriors I recognize. Raydan's chaste love and demi-magus, Desmonda, rides with her face lifted to the setting sun. At her side, riding a speckled horse the color of dust, is Lord Andreus, the famous general-turned-traitor who switched sides after the first failed battle at Wolfsgate. Then comes a motley collection of Dwarves, Orcs, and even a pair of High Elves – one male, one female – who make up the rest of his honor guard.

But behind them all, taking up the rear on his stiff-legged mule, is a little gray-haired man wearing a gray cloak, who radiates more magic than even an enraged Draconum. I recognize him from my studies. He is Maleficus, advisor to kings and one of the most renowned scholars in the Land – and now, from what I can sense in my scrying bowl, is apparently is a mage of unspeakable potential. The others do not seem to be aware of this, or to treat him with any reverence, and so far he has not noticed my presence.

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### **Jhegeri Pass** - Late Winter, Day 2

This morning, at the heights of the icy Jhegeri Pass, Raydan Marz and his band of warriors and mages were awake before dawn. By the time that the column of Galeshi Sunborn warriors arrived, Raydan and his warband had already prepared a hearty breakfast of exotic foods and drinks to honor their guests. While Raydan has left his floating tower somewhere to the east, amidst the Magestone-poisoned Blasted Lands where my scrying sight weakens and wanes, here I will be able to observe all without difficulty – provided that Raydan's wizard, Maleficus, does not notice my presence.

Forty Galeshi warriors, riding a mix of steam-powered mounts and flesh-horses, rode two by two up the eastern side of the pass, keeping the sun at their backs. With bows and pistols at the ready, they did not seem to openly trust Raydan and his open-armed invitation to break fast with him. But by courtesy and honor, two of the Sunborn leaders – a woman and a man, possibly a pair bound in marriage – sat down with Raydan, Desmonda and Maleficus to eat.

Raydan's offer is a simple one. In exchange for helping the Galeshi destroy Darq and the Moonborn, and return control over the western deserts, he would ask that the Galeshi fight, as free men and women, to drive the Orcs of the Shadow Khan tribes out of his own homeland of Prieska. While he says that he has no army, he does show them, with the tip of a stick drawn in the earth, that he has a flying tower that can carry them quickly and swiftly into battle.

The Galeshi pair ponder this silently for a time, sipping their tea. They return the verbal volley that Raydan Marz, while his successes as a warrior and a general are well known, that his failure to stop Darq from breaking the curse of the Vermillion Crown and enslaving Kossak Mageslayer doesn't give them much faith in his cause. Even with his alliance to the warriors of the Free Armies, the Galeshi don't believe that he has the resources to follow up on his promise.

“Kill Darq”, they tell him, “and then we will negotiate. But not a moment before. Make up for your past failures,” they add, “and then we will talk about creating a bright future between the Galeshi and the barbarians of Prieska.”

Without another word, the Galeshi mounted up and rode from Raydan's camp, heading west into the sea of sand below, leaving the warlord and his captains shaking their heads about what to do next.

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### **Wide Stone Door - Late Winter, Day 3**

With Raydan and his band moving back into the Magestone-infested Blasted Lands, and out of the range of my scrying pool, I decided instead to follow the Galeshi to their destination, to see how they are faring against Darq's war of annihilation against the desert peoples.

Within the heart of the desert, the dunes do not just tower and stand like silent temples of sand. Deep within the desert, away from the oases to the west, the dunes roll and move, like waves on a distant sea. While I was able to easily track the forty Galeshi riders along their course, and know the rough vicinity in which they ride, I could not guide warriors to their camp even if my life depended on it.

The mouth of a deep canyon, yawning between piles of swimming sand, marked the entrance to their lair. Down the length of a stone canyon they rode, two by two, until shadow swallowed them whole. Soon, their horse's hooves were no longer striking on

sand, but on solid stone, and the clatter of metal mounts and horseshoes rang within the walls. One of the lead scouts made a light from a stolen Magestone lamp, showing the edge of the nearly underground box canyon just a few yards away. While it took me a moment to realize what I was seeing, witnessing the gigantic door – covered in ancient markings and standing at least twenty feet in height – start to open made we well aware that this place once served as a meeting place or a base for the Elves of Rivvenheim unknown ages ago.

Within the door lay a small, underground structure, safe from heat and cold, from wind and the knives of Darq's riders. Maybe two hundred Galeshi were going about the process of surviving within the town-sized space, and taking advantage of the last of the afternoon light arcing down from skylights high above the smooth stone floor. Stories within the Solonavi archives tell of such places, but for a race as primitive as the Galeshi to have discovered and entered one of the well-guarded *hal'dre'theh* chambers is impressive.

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#### **Desert Mirage** - Late Winter, Day 4

Little occurs in hiding, as the Galeshi stationed within the underground *hal'dre'theh* caves have little to do with war or vengeance. They are largely concerned with their own survival, and tending to the warriors that ride against the hated Moonborn that patrol the Galeshi's lands. While the whistle of pipes and song is somewhat pleasant, and I've learned that there are a handful of similar chambers scattered throughout the western deserts, there is little for me here to report. When the warriors ride the next morning, two bands of six fighters directed to hunt down and slaughter their own treacherous vampiric kin, that seems to be a thing worth watching.

The trek out of the mountainous dunes is a treacherous one, and a giant scorpion nearly felled the living mount that the leader of the warband rides. For the Galeshi, horses are a very important cultural icon, and only a person of true worth and bravery is entitled to have one. After a sand-plague destroyed many of the Galeshi's horses, many of the warriors ride steam-mounts crafted by their one-time Dwarven allies. For a sand-scorpion – while the size of a horse itself – to nearly claim the life of one of these brave mounts would be a terrible loss, and the warriors take no time in hacking the thick-shelled, stinger-tailed creature into pieces with their swords and spears.

At the height of noon, the twelve warriors laid an ambush for a patrol of Moonborn vampire warriors. While vampires are not injured by sunlight, their capacity for quick movement seems to slow in the heat. In the midst of the mid-day heat, sand-mirages are common above the rippling dunes, and tricks of the light are common. The Galeshi make use of this by charging at the trio of vampire warriors in a single line, then spreading out into a pack for the final moments of the charge.

While the vampires, armed with broadswords and dressed all in tattered black robes and veils, rise to the fight with vengeance. There is only so much that three Moonborn can do

against twelve Sunborn riders. Watching all of the Galeshi dance, whirl, parry and rebound from attacks was a breathtaking spectacle to watch, as they lack the clumsy, blood-stained combats so prominent amongst Atlantean and Revolutionary warriors. By the time the combat was finished, five Galeshi lay destroyed – three vampires, and two desert warriors.

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### **Oasis of the White Owl - Late Winter, Day 5**

It took until the long hours of the night, but a lone Moonborn, vampire warrior eventually found the signs of the combat. Tasting the piles of ash left behind, he noted the three dead vampires, and the already fading tracks of a dozen mounts heading east into the untrackable wastes. Taking to the air, the vampire flew for a time over the dunes, colored only in white and shadow by the chilly light of the three quarter moon.

After an hour of searching the vampire flew west once again, and landed amidst the palm trees that marked the Oasis of the White Owl. There, entertained by dancing girls, storytellers, fools and braggarts, sat Prince Darq in a throne covered with jewels and gold. Sitting on a stone slab in front of the sizable pool of clear, cool water, any other warrior would have looked vain and silly. But Darq, with his dark, hungry gaze, his black and red velvet cloak, and his sword ready and waiting by his side, reminded me more of a coiling snake sitting on a treasure trove of gold and jewels, poised to strike at anyone that extended their hand.

As the warrior made the report to Darq, bowed on one knee in front of his liege, the Vampire-Lord seemed very unmoved by his loss of warriors. He merely ordered one of his generals – a ferocious, dour-looking Galeshi warrior smiling through sharpened fangs – to rotate the duty roster so another four units could be assigned to search for the remaining Galeshi strongholds. While he could tolerate the Galeshi heading west, towards the distant, uninhabitable coast and the rippling deserts, for the Galeshi to have strongholds on the edges of the deep desert would be problematic.

Quick as a striking mongoose, a desert dancer spun from her position at his knee, a knife poised in her hand, striking for Darq's throat. Believing him distracted by the report of his scout, she was greatly surprised when the blade struck the back of the stone throne with a metallic clank. Before she could move, Darq had lifted her by the throat into the moonlit air, her slipper-clad feet daintily kicking at his metal breastplate. He didn't say a word, but merely growled a deep, resentful growl, then punctured her throat and spine with all five of his clawed fingers at once, as easily as I would crush an orange in my bare fist.

Red rain from her throat spotted the sand like drops of fallen wine. Angrily, he tossed the corpse across the pool, and let the wild dogs that frequented the camp have their nightly meat. Taking his place in his throne once again, he clapped his bloody hands, and the revel of music, flesh, and revelry began once again, overshadowing the sounds of the dogs crunching the dancer's bones behind them.

### **Zombie Trail - Late Winter, Day 6**

The high walls of the Elemental fortress of Roanne Valle called my curiosity this morning. From my point of sight along the well-manned length of the perimeter wall, my scrying pool revealed the cool quiet of early morning, just before the sun had begun to shine its brilliance over the top of the Sturnmounts behind the stalwart citadel. Wylden Elves patrol the walls with bows and spears, keeping a careful eye on the Crusader army camped a little more than a half-mile distant.

Every hour of every day, more Zombies arrive from the distant Necropolis. Herded by apprentice Necromancers, these undead seem to be controlled by one dominating force. Seeing so many undead working in unison is awesome, but the control required to make even a hundred Zombies fall into perfect step with one another would be the match of any of the greatest Deathspeakers living today. Here, thousands of Zombies perform labors in perfect, steady time with one another, never dropping a stone or missing a footstep along the long, zig-zagging road that leads to the top of the Wylden Plateau.

Every few seconds, another goblin-sized rock arrives at the top of the cliff, carried perfectly by four to six servile undead. While the rocks being brought up from the valley below will never be enough to shatter the massive walls surrounding Roanne Valle, they will certainly be more than enough to crack, fragment, and shatter the nerves of the inhabitants within. While the true invasion will likely not begin until Soma, the Dark Prophet, gives the signal to attack, Kossak Darkbringer's army grows every day with more undead – some sent by the Necropolis, others harvested from the forests of the Wylden - all controlled by the same, eerie, seemingly omnipotent Necromantic force.

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### **Slaying Dragons - Late Winter, Day 7**

Kossak Darkbringer speaks to his generals today from within the confines of his command tent. The weather outside is foul and cold, with a light drizzle that leaves a light frosting of ice on the helms, gauntlets, and leather capes of the vampire-warriors standing guard outside. Within, in a room lit by smoky candles and torches, Kossak speaks to his warlords about how to go about slaying one of the very things he once loved – dragons, one of the fiercest protectors of the Land.

Kossak, through use of his natural Troll skills as a storyteller, is educating his generals how the Elementals use Dragons to fight, and how to gain advantage over the winged beasts in case the Wylden Elves finally call their allies to battle. While I too have wondered why the Dragons have not come, with their weapons of fire, shadow and ice, I can only assume that their numbers are finite, and must be wielded carefully in face of

the days to come. While some of the lesser pit-fighters joke of the Dragons abandoning the children of this False Tezla, I believe that the true answer lies within the chambers deep within Roanne Valle, outside of the range of my scrying sight.

While Kossak's obvious answer to slaying a dragon, by means of concentrating fire upon one point, is one that even I have heard again and again in the Necromantic Academy as a young mage, his solution of sending groups of Zombie warriors to climb and blind the beast is original. While the Dragon's shield-like double eyelids are likely stronger than any Zombie's grip, the very act of being covered with clinging, biting ants may well give our stronger warriors advantages with their spears and pikes, for the cost of a few Zombies that would otherwise be crushed or burned beneath the Dragon's wrath.

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### **Shattering Stone - Late Winter, Day 8**

The catapults are ready this morning, more than fifteen light, mobile devices that can be easily moved in and out of range. With thousands of stones already brought from the river valley far below the cliff's edge, the undead Trolls in service of the Dark Crusade nearly need to follow instruction – lift, load, and step away – and let the experienced vampire siegers attend to aim and distance.

Moving my sight once again to the walls, the first volley of rocks – fired from far outside of even the greatest archer's range – fly up into the air like a scattering of deadly birds. Then, rocks explode and shatter all along the front face of the Elemental castle, striking randomly both high and low, by the door and by the parapet, and even some thudding into the ground a dozen yards in front of the base of the massive wall.

I'll give the Forest Elves some good credit, in that few of them show any outward signs of fear at that rain of deadly stone. They watch with disinterest as their distant enemies prepare the next wave, and casually move out of the way as, once again, the heavy stones arc down from high above. While one youngster is caught by an unlucky bounce and a ricochet, and his chest crushed like fruit under a hammer, the rest gird their spirit and continue their vigil, ready to destroy any Crusader warrior that gets within killing range.

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### **Deadly Cargo - Late Winter, Day 9**

The walls of Roanne Valle stand strong, though many of the front stones and decorations are chipped or smashed by the endless rain of stones. Gargoyles carved centuries ago to forever watch the walls of this Elemental fortress lie headless and broken. Beautiful stone doorways trimmed by lintels of the finest marble are cracked and powdered by the rain of the projectiles. Here and there stains discolor the walkways, showing signs that at least a few of the missiles met their mark.

But this next wave of rocks, now fired to the top of the wall with two days of sure practice by Kossak's engineers, are different. When these split open, they yield a fleshy cargo hungry for the taste of meat and blood. Goblins, stolen from the Fist, infused with the vampire essence by the dark power of Necromantic alchemy, steal forth, leaping and climbing onto the shrieking Forest Elven warriors with deadly strength. While some of these beasts lie broken and shattered from the fall, at least a dozen survived to exact a terrible vengeance on the enemy. One of these diminutive vampires, clad in a rotting cloak clasped with a shining pin of silver, makes a gesture and vanishes from sight, and is immediately lost amidst the carnage and the coming clatter of reinforcements charging up from the lower levels.

When the vampires are slain and set in a pile to burn, the Elves of Roanne Valle took only a handful of casualties from the attack, and already set additional watches to be ready in case such an odd assault happens again. But amongst this castle of a hundred thousand occupants, there is one peculiar beast with a mission that has yet to be revealed – and the ways of Necromancers, as of all of True Tezla's kin – are devious and cunning beyond compare.

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### **Torn Wings** - Late Winter, Day 10

Of the members of the Circle of Nine, one now lies dead at the hands of a Crusader assassin. In last night's raid of stones and Goblin Vampires fired over the impregnable wall of Roanne Valle, one Goblin Sorcerer hid under cover of magic from the Elven defenders. Today, after a brutal attack within one of the better defended sections of the castle, one of the Sprite princesses of the already shattered Faerie kingdoms of the north lies dead. When the guards were alerted by her screams, they found her tiny body half-eaten, with her wings chewed off by the loathsome Crusader Goblin, his teeth and face stained with shining Faerie blood.

The guards hacked the assassin to pieces, and did their best to save the only daughter of one of the key leaders of the Circle of Nine. But the princesses' savaged body was beyond repair. With her death, Driathania, the Queen of the Sprites, has turned into a creature of vengeance and rage. She accuses the Forest Elves of incompetence and states that the death of her only daughter is an act that must be repayed in blood – and that if by the end of the siege of Roanne Valle vengeance has not been met, she herself will ensure that those that failed to protect her will meet an end at her own enchanted knife.

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### **Giant's March** - Late Winter, Day 11

My masters alerted me this morning to an event taking place along the northeastern edge of the occupied country of Prieska. For the long winter months since the Battle of Rokos, tribes of Orcs loyal to the Shadow Khans have had a busy time capturing slaves, looting whole carts of food and rolling tuns of ale to their winter camps along the stretch of hilly crags known as the Giant's March.

After spending all day raiding the few remaining Prieskan villages in the area, the green-skinned warriors revel nightly around great bonfires constructed from the remains of shattered log walls and houses. This morning, while the ale-fog still lay heavily upon the four dozen Orcs of the tribe of the Black Skulls, a flight of Dragonflies descended upon one of these camps with a vengeance. Piloted by men and Elves, the dozen aerial assailants delivered crossbow bolts and rifle shot into the Shadow Khan defenders all throughout the camp.

While the Orcs outnumbered the fliers, they were no match for the agile attackers and had few weapons or shamans with which to counter the deadly ranged assault. Within an hour the leader of the Black Skulls gave the order to retreat. When the Orcs vanished over a distant hillside, the Dragonfly warriors landed their devices, and freed the Prieskan slaves left behind during the Orc's flight. Elated, the prisoners – men and women, old and young alike – were told to run north for the Blasted Lands, and that the fliers would provide cover for them until they reached a safe haven.

While my magical sight was negated long before the runners could reach their destination, as the Magestone emanations from the area disrupt my scrying magics, I don't doubt in the slightest that the fliers are in the service of the renegade warlord, Raydan Marz.

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### **Broken Wings - Late Winter, Day 12**

In the heart of the snowy Prieskan wilds, a log fort burns brightly against the foreboding gray skies. A surge of Orcs smashes against the front gates of the human village, using a toppled wolf-decorated totem pole to batter down the doors. While the Prieskans give a good fight, firing their bows and slings from the top of the low walls down upon the heads of the fifty raging warriors below, it will be only a matter of time before the gates are breached, and the defenders are overcome by the Shadow Khans.

A flutter of mechanical wings can be gently heard over the din. Driving down out of the low clouds, the half dozen stolen Dragonfly war machines manned by Raydan Marz' best pilots roll and target for the attack. But before even a single shot can be fired into the throng of green-skinned bodies at the gate, four Half-Trolls rise up out of their hiding places in the snow, tossing aside the icy burlap sacks that provided their camouflage.

With each of the monstrous half-Orc, Half-Troll beasts armed with a pile of lightweight throwing spears, they quickly set to the task of trying to bring down as many of the enemy as possible. One dragonfly spirals to the earth from more than a hundred feet in the air, its wing punctured by a long shaft. Another one is forced to crash headlong into the ground, sending up a plume of dirt, muddy snow, and shattered machine parts. While the remaining fliers manage to rescue the two injured pilots and limp out of range, there is little they can do for the villagers. The gate sunders inward with a crash, crushing some of the Prieskan warriors within, and the battle is joined. Within an hour, the village



is captured, slaves are chained, and the Orc warriors of the Black Skull tribe are looting every bin, chest, and cupboard they can find.

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### **Beheading the Serpent - Late Winter, Day 13**

The war-leaders and shamans of the Shadow Khans tribes met last night within sight of the walls of Alrisar, and held a convocation of war. Their chief concern – putting an end to the Dragonfly assaults, and finding some way of tracking down and destroying the base these combat pilots were flying from. Many Orc warriors offered to personally confront and destroy Raydan Marz, and some scuffling began over which warrior should have the right to battle the human interloper.

But when a powerful Orc Shaman by the name of Bloodhawk stepped forward into the firelight, many of the squabbling warriors ceased their arguing without another word. A number of Orc chieftains seemed to hold a great deal of superstitious reverence for this mage, as they instinctively bowed their heads when the eagle-masked entered the circle.

Bloodhawk, speaking in the guttural, choppy Orc tongue, offered that the many tribes of the Shadow Khans should continue to slave, raid and pillage, and that his hand-picked band of shadow warriors would work to strike off the head of the serpent. Then, the Shaman snapped his fingers, and a pair of two footed, feathered beasts skulked into the camp, snapping and biting at the startled Orcs with its axe-like beak. On the backs of the bird-mounts, guiding their monsters by subtle tugs of the reins, rode a pair of Orc warriors dressed entirely in black, each holding a drawn, curved sword carved entirely from mirror-like blackstone.

“Consider this matter dealt with,” continued Bloodhawk. “My warriors shall ride into the Blasted Lands upon these Warbirds I captured in the uncharted lands to the north. Once within the wastes, my warriors shall track down the enemy and smash their skulls. Assembled members of the Shadow Khans, do not lose focus upon savaging this weak, human country, and leave the destruction of this petty warlord to myself and my kin.”

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### **Shadows and Omens - Late Winter, Day 14**

This dusk, the wizard Bloodhawk sits in a underground pit, dug by his initiates over the course of the day. With the top of the pit covered by skins and hides, and a smoky fire built in the middle of the space, he seems to be ready to start some kind of magical ritual. Tossing grass bundles of herbs and dried leaves onto the fire, he chants even as he taps a ritual drum with a bone mallet.

The Shadow Khans warriors give this wizard and his kin wide berth. While these strange Orcs may have ties to the Shadow Khans, they do not ride or eat amongst them, and keep to themselves at all times. This morning, when more than a dozen of the warriors mounted up for war, and sprinted off into the northern distance on their Warbird mounts,

the other Shadow Khan warriors watched them go with more than a little dread at what foul ends would come to those who served Raydan Marz.

Within the pit, Bloodhawk changes the color and hue of the fire with the addition of a handful of sparkling salts. Suddenly, all around the walls of the small chamber, shadows of battle suddenly manifest to life. Orc warriors wheel and chop on their mounts, while thrown hatchets tear through both meat and metal to send human warriors and Dragonflies tumbling to the earth. Low shapes of Dwarves, and the tall thin silhouettes of Elves fight side by side against Orc warriors, fighting for their lives against a terrible, unstoppable enemy. Throughout the long fight, the wizard occasionally grunts guttural commands, establishing the right times to attack, retreat, and when his troops should refocus on a new or unseen enemy. His warriors fight and die in complete silence, as not even a single battle-cry sounds from the phantoms dancing across the walls of his makeshift scrying shrine.

Hours later, when the battle lines are divided, and when the fire finally gutters out, Bloodhawk crawls from his pit, his lungs raspy with green smoke. He orders his disciples to gather more herbs, more dried leaves, as tomorrow night his warriors will attack the tower belonging to Raydan Marz -- head-on.

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### **Shadow Battle - Late Winter, Day 15**

As my scrying pool cannot delve far into the Blasted Lands, I once again settle to watch the Orc Shaman, Bloodhawk, cast his deadly divination within his pit of smoke and shadow. Again, he sits in his pit and casts handfuls of grasses and powders into the flames. But this time, the Shaman has four of his disciples with him, each wearing a simple robe over their pockmarked green skin. When he calls upon the power of shadow once again, phantoms of his warriors once again are cast against the walls of the earthen pit, showing a battle line of Orc warriors driving hard towards a tower-like structure to the east. Arrows fall and lightning crashes down in the heavens, but his warriors drive towards the tower with greater determination and speed.

The tower begins to lift from the earth, and begins to hover up into the sky. From my own knowledge, Raydan likely utilizes the power of the Sphere of Jorandal to levitate the structure out of the reach of the coming riders – a cowardly but wise strategy. But on Bloodhawk's command, each of his four disciples takes a bone knife and slashes their fingers with the blade, and spatters their blood into the fire. All around the riders, a nimbus of fire-light surrounds them, sparking and shimmering like a fiery luminescence amongst the shadow. As one, the riders raise their weapons, and a crackle of lava-colored light bursts from their swords against the tower. Then again. And then again a third time. Cracks appear in the archetype of the floating citadel, and giant stones seem to tumble from the base of the structure down to the shadowy ground below.

Atop the tower, a form surrounded by a halo of icy light appears, and raises a long, crooked staff over its head. Bloodhawk screams challenge, and stands to his full height,

screaming out words of power in the Orcish tongue. Lightning strikes the top of the structure, sending bodies flying in all directions. With a brilliant flash of burning white light, the white wizard raised his staff and fires a bolt of brilliant light straight towards Bloodhawk. Like a cannon-shot, the firepit in the center of the pit explodes into a cloud of flying embers, destroying the scrying and negating Bloodhawk's concentration in one motion. Screaming with rage, the shaman stamps the fiery coals with his feet, while his students frantically try to knock stray sparks from his hair and clothing.

The moment is passed, and the spell is broken. Raydan's wizard could not stop Bloodhawk's warriors from attacking and damaging the tower, but he could stop the shaman's distant spell by some means. Only tomorrow will tell whether Bloodhawk's warriors were successful in their attack, and whether Raydan Marz escaped with his life.

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### **A Single Prisoner - Late Winter, Day 16**

Bloodhawk's riders return from the battle with a prize, a pretty female demi-magus with a single piece of Magestone set into her forehead. Knocked from the tower's parapet during the battle, young Desmonda now stands as a war-prize in the Orc Shaman's tent. Her mage robes are stained with blood and ash, and her eyes already bloodshot from the concoction of mind-altering herbs her captors force-feed her every few hours. She will do no magic for as long as she remains in Bloodhawk's power, and he chortles at both her beauty, and her continued, drunken promises of her lover's eventual, bloody vengeance against the Orc wizard.

Of Bloodhawk's riders, half lie dead in the Blasted Lands, left behind for the Mage Spawn to consume as they desire. But his surviving warriors state that Raydan's tower has lost some of its ability to fly, and that he will need to find new sources of Magestone in order for his citadel to regain full flight capability. Bloodhawk takes a chunk of shattered magestone from one of his warriors, and licks his tongue along the rough edges, savoring the taste of fading power within the fractured crystal.

“With a number of his Magestone blocks shattered or broken, Raydan must fly directly along the ley-lines,” he says to his warriors. “Just as the parched wanderer cannot afford to wander from the path that leads to the oasis, no matter what dangers lay ahead, Raydan must guide his damaged sky-ship along the straight tracks, and must that he can gain enough blocks of Magestone to repair his vessel. We have damaged him greatly, and my Orcs will track Raydan in the days to come, and ensure that he does not find safe rest anywhere near Orcish lands. Then, when the warlord least expects it, we will strike, and make him pay dearly for meddling in the affairs of Prieska.”

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### **Blasted Earth - Late Winter, Day 17**

Above the beautiful rolling valley that runs to the west of Stonekeep Castle, a dark cloud of dust and smoke hovers above the frozen grasslands. Beneath the cloud, a quarter mile of land lies smoldering and crisped, with groves of hundred-year old trees smashed to splinters from the force of an intense magical blast. At the epicenter of the explosion, a Draconum corpse dressed in splintered, heat-warped armor lies putrifying in the residual heat. Even hours after the blast, the ground still steams and smolders from the effects of the supernatural devastation.

As I watched, a column of Wylden Host warriors from Stonekeep rode up to the site, bows and swords at the ready. While first as awestruck as I was with the magnitude of destruction, their Rangers quickly found the dead Draconum, then scoured the ground for survivors and discovered only a few Crusader corpses. While some of the Dark Elves appeared to have been boiled alive in their own juices, others were simply blown into component parts that not even the most skilled Necromancer could make any use of.

One of the warriors, a young Elven maiden dressed in the green robes of an Elemental Priestess, concentrated at the epicenter of the blast zone, seemingly invoking the power of the earth to reveal any clues. After some concentration, the young sorceress moved, as if in trance, to a spot just a few paces away. Reaching down within a gloved hand, she thrust her fingers into the dirt and lifted out a short sword. After blowing dirt and dust off the rune-inscribed blade, the Priestess inspected the otherwise undamaged weapon. After a few moments, she proclaimed the weapon to be some kind of Draconum spellbreaker, that it was likely was used to shatter a Crusader relic, and thus was responsible for the devastating explosion.

When asked what to do with the weapon, and whether it should be taken to Stonekeep or delivered to Roanne Valle, the Priestess shook her head. She stated that the sword must be disposed of, as the spirits within the weapon were destructive and unnatural. While the other members of the warband postulated amongst themselves about what schism took place between the Crusaders and the Draconum on Stonekeep's doorstep, the Priestess, named Rhiamon, asked for volunteers to accompany her to the Emerald Grove, where the dangerous weapon could be safely disposed of. Rhiamon received the support of three female Rangers, and would leave immediately. The rest of the warband would ride back to Stonekeep to report on the situation, and send word ahead that Rhiamon was coming to deliver a dangerous tool into the hands of the Mysteries of the Emerald Glade.

As the four Elven women began their ride south to the occupied Wylden Plateau, I watched their travel with great interest, as the interior of the Emerald Glade is a place that I – as well as just about every other sorceress of the Necropolis – have always wanted to see with my own eyes.

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### **Travel to the Glade - Late Winter, Day 18**

The Elemental priestess Rhiamon and her three Rangers made slow time edging along the western slopes of the Sturnmonts, keeping well out of the way of Crusader patrols.

While their horses were strong and swift, they are bred for speed on the plains rather than skirting outcroppings of rock and forging muddy streams. By sundown, the Elementals have managed to avoid detection, but only traveled a few miles southeast of the mouth of South Pass.

Hunched over a small, smokeless fire, the four forest elves camp between two fingers of rock extending outward from the steep mountainside above. With their horses tethered and grazing on thin winter grass nearby, the three scouts talk quietly of the events of the day, and of the presence of the Crusaders in the Elemental homeland. Behind them, her face cast in shadow, Rhiamon continues to inspect the artifact with introspective silence.

Speaking a few words of power, the Priestess wreathes the blade in a dim nimbus of flickering blue flames. When one of the scouts asks what she sees, Rhiamon shakes her head and answers that she sees little of use. She relays that the disturbing presence surrounding the weapon the previous day now seems to slumber, and that the sharp-edged blade seems to radiate little magic.

When the embers die down, Rhiamon dutifully places the weapon back into her saddlebags, and lays down on her bedroll to try to sleep. For more than an hour, I watched as the Priestess contemplated the mysteries of the artifact, before she finally went to sleep. While one of the female Rangers keeping watch over the camp did her best to keep vigilant, her eyes continued to drift to Rhiamon's saddlebags, as if she were pondering the dangerous contents within.

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### **Shovels and Spades - Late Winter, Day 19**

This morning, one of the three Rangers lies dead. The scout that took second watch, a young Elf named Maribell, heard and saw nothing during her watch. With no visible marks or signs of violence upon the corpse, to all appearances it seems as if the Ranger merely died in her sleep. Rhiamon, greatly disturbed by the turn of events, went and arcanely checked the magical short-sword, but there was no change in the artifact that she could detect.

Unable to cremate the body for fear of the smoke bringing Crusader patrols, the three companions dutifully buried their friend as deeply as they could in the rocky soil. Skipping breakfast, the survivors mounted up and began riding quickly toward the Wylden Plateau to the south. They shared little conversation, preferring to mourn their friend's death in silence.

When faced with the choice of either navigating around or over a sizable stretch of boulder-clogged hillside, Rhiamon elected that the group take the longer but more discreet route through the maze of stones. She believed that the Elementals could not afford for the weapon to fall into the enemy's hands, as its destructive power could be easily used by the Crusaders to bring doom upon the walls of Roanne Valle.

While the Elves narrowly averted discovery by a patrol of Nightblades, chiefly through a combination of stealth and patience, their steady progress brought them close to the base of the Wylden Plateau. This time they camped without fire in the shelter of a small grove of trees and waited in the dark for dawn to come.

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### **Stone and Water - Late Winter, Day 20**

In the morning light, Maribell sits against her tree, her eyes glazed and dull with death. Neither Rhiamon or the remaining scout saw anything, and both swear to one another that they were awake for the entire night. But the corpse proves that something happened, and Rhiamon has lost another of her Ranger's to the deadly malady.

The discussion is swift and brisk. The last remaining Ranger, an Elf with unruly hair named Wildgrass, superstitiously argues that the soul-eating weapon must be brought before nightfall to the Emerald Glade, and disposed of by the Mysteries before it has a chance to consume another victim. Rhiamon agrees, and offers that the two of them ride straight for the hidden pass that leads up onto the plateau. Wildgrass agrees; the two of them cremate Maribell's corpse to prevent reanimation, and then ride as fast as they can for the thousand-foot high wall of stone to the south. They quickly gain pursuers, but the fast Wylden horses are more than a match for the Crusader steeds. While the Crusaders can pursue the pair of Elves endlessly, Rhiamon believes that she has enough of a head-start to reach the passage to the top of the plateau before their pursuers can catch them.

A thundering waterfall greets them, cascading down a steep, boulder-strewn slope. Rhiamon, as a trained Priestess of the Glade, raises her hand and says a single word, quietly, so only the crashing waters can hear her. Within a few moments the froth of water abates, leaving behind a magically dry riverbed with just enough room for a well-trained horse to ride. After the two riders guided their horses up more than a hundred feet of riverbank, the path diverted into a fissure cave. As soon the two enter into the dark path to continue the climb up to the plateau's top, the waterfall resumes its course, covering all trace of their passage.

Within the darkness, shapes are indistinct and horse-hooves echo on the stone. But within the space of just a few minutes, the anguished scream of a dying Elf is unmistakable, nor is the sound of an armored body collapsing heavily to the rock floor of the passage.

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### **Dangerous Weapons - Late Winter, Day 21**

Just after dawn, a frantic Rhiamon reaches the top of the secret underground passage. Behind her, Wildgrass's horse follows obediently, her doomed rider lashed belly-down across his broad back. Rhiamon's face looks as if she stands on the brink of her sanity, and the cursed short-sword in her hand proves that she has indeed reached the edge.

On the edge of the Glade, there stands no Crusader picket line, for there is no point in guarding the borders of this Elemental bastion. For millennia a magical barrier has long dissuaded evil from entering within the depths of the haunted forest, and the silver wolves and keen-eyed archers secreted amongst the trees have long ensured the safety of the Mysteries that lie within.

When Rhiamon rides into the trees, a cold wind leaps up around her, setting both horses nearly mad with fear. Clouds of blowing leaves blur her sight, and stormclouds roll over the tree-tops with black fury. A figure in robes the color of autumn leaves appears on the path before her, flanked by a pair of silver wolves with eyes the color of ivy. Rhiamon dismounts and kneels before the ancient Elven matriarch, stating that she is honored to be met by one of the Mysteries of the Glade. Rhiamon says that she has brought an object of great evil to be hidden away by the Mysteries. The powerful Elementalist comes before her and takes the sword in her hand, and lifts it to the stormy sky, inspecting the dangerous weapon.

The Matriarch then states that the sword is empty, its purpose already fulfilled with the three deaths that Rhiamon caused by her own hand. While the Mystery agrees to keep the weapon away from mortals for the duration of the coming Age, she says that the spirits trapped within the blade have already found their host – and that which was life within Rhiamon, has now been transformed by the power of the relic into death. When Rhiamon looks up, her eyes burn with unnatural fury, and all beauty is gone from her face. She hisses at the Matriarch, and speaks curses from a language not known to elves for more than a thousand years.

Not strong enough to confront the terrible creatures that rides within the Priestess, the Matriarch merely turns her back, and walks into the trees, leaving Rhiamon to her madness and her fate. By nightfall, Rhiamon has presented herself at Kossak's camp, already feverish and consumed with the need for power.

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## **Crater Lake - Late Winter, Day 22**

Agents loyal to my Solonavi masters reported this morning that a flight of Griffons crossed over the Vurgra Divide, gliding down from the eastern mountains in the direction of Crater Lake. the sight of High Elves flying around the Rivvenheim peaks is not uncommon, reports of seeing sixteen fliers moving in combat formation so far away from the safety of their precious mountain homeland is highly unusual.

The crater lake to the northeast of the Necropolis Isle was created sometime before the Age of Mists, scooped out of living stone by a massive volcanic explosion that shook the region for hundreds of miles around. Except for a few days each year, the steaming waters of this sizable, shallow lake completely obscure visibility. The handful of secret Necromancer towers and fortresses built along the fog-shrouded shores are legendary

amongst the elite of the Dark Crusade, and stand as the sites of some of the most deadly research projects in our history. While the creation of Bloodsuckers and the Bloodsucker Plague that devastated the Atlantean interior had some merit, the artificially-created Sand Plague that wiped out the Galeshi's horses and oxen in the summer of 426 Tz was a particularly brilliant piece of alchemy that stripped down one of the greatest threats to our domination of the Land in the space of a few short months.

The Griffon Rider's destination is unknown to me so far, but I shall keep a keen eye out for these invaders, as the trouble that even a handful of determined High Elves can cause is legendary amongst my people.

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### **Drowning Pool - Late Winter, Day 23**

While scanning the Crater Lake for any sign of the Elven Lords and their griffon steeds, I thought I overheard the sounds of combat in the vicinity of the southern shore. While the thick fog muffled the screams, battle cries, and exact location of both elf and mount, the distinct sound of a large body splashing nearby was unmistakable.

I managed to find the disturbance in the mists, a bare spot where the wings of a drowning griffon had fanned the fog apart. While there was no sign of the rider, save for a thick coating of red, sticky blood sprayed along the left side of the griffon's saddle, the struggling griffon indicated that the Crusaders had dealt some damage during the battle high above. The black throwing spear buried deep into the mount's breast indicated that the beast had not long to live, even if it weren't in danger of sinking beneath the bubbling surface of the crater lake.

Then, to my surprise, another griffon appeared out of the fog, its majestic wings cutting through the misty air. Just as the first mount went under, the second one flapped its wings hard, driven by its High Elven rider to try to grab the doomed griffon below. But, the Elven Lord was too late, and the mount vanished beneath the surface. Before its own weight could drag his mount into the water, the High Elf angrily gave the command to continue, and to leave his companion for dead.

Greedily, I locked my scrying pool onto the second griffon, and will likely have a great deal more to talk about once the beast lands at whatever encampment the High Elves have secreted away along the shores of this steaming lake.

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### **Kastali's Cavern - Late Winter, Day 24**

Fifteen High Elves and fifteen mounts are secluded in a cave along the eastern side of the steaming crater lake. Ironically, the cave is one where I used to play when I was a child, when my own mother was taking her magical training with Deathspeaker Aeradon. While most of the other children were involved with the blood-pits or the ongoing rigors of proving ones superiority, myself and my friend, Vadoria, would practice hunting one



another amidst the stalagmites, or work together against the cruel but imaginary Atlanteans camped in the darkness. The fact that Vadoria died in this very cave after I surprised her on a high ledge during one of our chases, strikes me as a double irony, as her well-preserved skeleton is still concealed behind the rock ledge the warriors are leaning up against as they eat.

Now, the cave is filled with High Elves, and their magical fire-stones provide dim light, but enough warmth to heat the cave and cook their food. They sharpen blades, speak in their esoteric and difficult temple language, and eat food from lightweight metal bowls with the gusto of a starving Orc. The griffons, chewing and gulping down a combination of meat and grain from leathery feed-bags, make for an odd sight, lined up against the wall like human's horses. But their wings, their great claws, and their ever-watchful eyes makes them far more than just ordinary mounts. I'm still surprised they don't notice my magical emanations, and am very grateful for that fact.

On a personal note, I never told anyone about Vadoria, and her disappearance was a mystery to everyone, save for my own mother who seemed to know everything even before I could start lying to her. But my own mother's "sudden disappearance" after she displeased her master, Aeradon, is something I will never, ever forget, and will ensure that one day, when I return to lead the Crusade, Aeradon is the first to die.

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### **Soulmare** - Late Winter, Day 25

This morning, just after dawn, the griffons grew restless, pulling at their tethers and clacking their beaks in irritation. While the High Elves tended to their mounts, trying to quiet them while they tied on saddlebags and supplies, I moved my presence out of the cave mouth, into the unmeasurable deeps of the foggy morning. From high above, I recognized the flapping sound of slow, sizable wings in the mist, and moved towards the location as quickly as my scrying device would allow me.

In the mist, I soon found the flyer, having recognized the pattern of its wing-beats by easy association. A Fell Beast, rarely seen anymore in the presence of the Necropolis, flapped its tattered wings as it glided in a lazy circle above one point in the lake. On its back, one of the more legendary figures of the Dark Crusade, a powerful Hag Witch named Daemona, guided the beast in a search pattern through the fog. Behind Daemona, perched on the Fell Beast's back, sat Rhiamon, her hands raised in silent invocation.

From far below, a gurgling cry erupted from the water, and a great splashing could be heard. As the Fell Beast swung lower to the surface of the sulphurous mire, I caught a glimpse of something I already suspected I'd see – the High Elven griffon that drowned and died two days ago was struggling its way out of the water. A few minutes later, when the waterlogged creature dragged itself onto shore, where Rhiamon greeted it, mounted it, and then ordered it to fly. Without hesitation, the creature shook the water out of its wings, and then ascended into the air, with its new master laughing with cruel delight at her new-found ally.

### **Flooding the Divide - Late Winter, Day 26**

After acquiring her new mount, which Rhiamon called the Soulmare out of cruel deference to the legendary horses of the Wylden Plateau, the powerful sorceress followed Daemona to a cave to the northwest of the lake, where Daemona's sister, Hebrodia, awaited the two to arrive.

While the Hag Witches are believed to be the results of sorcerous experiments conducted within the Necropolis, to everything I know they are long-lived creatures that have seen centuries, if not millennia, of time go by in the Land. Their ability to scry and divine rivals even that of the fabled Oracles of Rokos, though their answers are always grim and have some dark tiding tied within.

While Rhiamon warmly accepted their hospitality and a seat at their fire, Daemona wasted no time in telling her what her sister had prophesied, and why she contacted Kossak Darkbringer for the loan of a potent ally. The High Elves sent a group of their best warriors to search out the Turning Door, a place lost to mortals since the dawn of the Age of Mists. At the Turning Door, the High Elves may be able to open a sluice gate that will drain a great deal of the lake water – down into the depths of the Vurgra Divide. While the amount of water will not be especially damaging, save for a temporary flood that will slowly spread over the period of days, the sulphurous content within the water will poison the crops and render the river undrinkable for a time.

Rhiamon laughs at this, and says that she no longer has any ties to the Land, nor does she care about whether the sluice is opened or not. But she does understand that she needs to win Kossak's trust, and will do everything she can to stop the Elven Lords before their plan can succeed. The Hags offer their own services, and the services of their other hideous sisters to Rhiamon's cause – and soon, an aerial battle will be joined that will determine the fate of the Vurgra Divide.

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### **Valley of the Gods - Late Winter, Day 27**

Today, on order of the Oracles of the Black Tower, a young wizard attends my chamber, watching as I scry a new area for my Solonavi masters. Together we witnessed a spectacle that has rarely been seen before in the Land.

Inbetween the territories controlled by the Cave Orc tribes, and the grassy Orc homeland known throughout the Land as 'the Fist', lies a region of broken mountains, treacherous paths, and more varieties of Mage Spawn than can be counted by a legion of scholars. While the lush Crow Valley acts as a buffer zone between the Blasted Lands to the south, just to the north lies a massive deposit of Magestone crystals that the Empire has never even considered trying to take. Being so far north of the Empire, and with the only tracks

leading through either Mage Spawn infested territory, or tribal lands belonging to the xenophobic Orc tribes, the Magestone deposits northeast of the Cave Orc territories have been investigated only by rogue Heroes and the fiercest Draconum.

An Orc tribe has slowly made its way out of the lush grasslands of the Fist, and have made their way to the Crow Valley with minimal losses. From there, they began the dangerous climb up to the Valley of the Gods. While I suspect that my scrying chamber will not have the capability to follow the Orc tribe past a certain point, within an hour of starting to follow their passage it became a moot point. From out of the skies above the Valley of the Gods came a flight of Draconum warriors and mages, intent on death and destruction. The chieftain of the Orcs, a slack-jawed, drooling tusked warrior, stood and stared at the oncoming death. While his family members began to panic and run, the chieftain's Shaman, a spindly, treacherous looking creature, grinned and cast a spell that vanished him from sight. The Orc blinked, shook his head, and screamed in rage just as a Draconum tyrant plunged an enchanted blade straight through his heart.

Just as the Draconum swept into the Orc ranks, chopping the screaming greenskins into pieces with their swords and spells, another force appeared from the south, glowing in colors that would make the muted rainbow of the dusk aurora seem pale. The Solonavi, having sprung the trap on the Draconum, engaged them in full combat, leaving the scattering Orcs to their own fate.

The Draconum quickly moved from the battleground to regroup and work out a new plan. The Oracle, satisfied with my performance, went to report to his masters on the success of the ambush, and that the first stages of the plan for the capture of the Valley of the Gods were now underway.

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### **Footsoldiers - Late Winter, Day 28**

Having followed the Solonavi back to their point of origin, I discovered that a sizable group of warriors, mages, priests and nobility had encamped at the southern edge of Crow Valley. About thirty of these warriors were ready at the service of their Solonavi masters, each having made a bond of service with the Solonavi sometime during the last couple of years. Now, with the favor called in, they were doomed to answer their duty in this cursed and forsaken section of the Land.

But at the darkest hour of the night, the sound of wings could be heard on the wind. With scouts already expecting retribution by the Draconum, they called out the watch without a moment of hesitation. All around the campsite, the Solonavi warriors leading the small, professional army began to glow with brighter light, and weapons of power manifested in their long-fingered hands. The grasslands were filled with light and shadow, as the fiery, jewel-hues of the Solonavi masters cast their brilliance through the night.

But the attackers were not Draconum, but Drakona, warriors from the distant city of Dragon's Gate. Screaming challenge, the ancient dragon-men swept down upon the waiting warriors without hesitation, swords swinging deadly, bloody arcs through the moonlight. While the Solonavi fought methodically, hewing with their weapons and blasting with their relics of power, their mortal footsoldiers could not withstand the Drakona assault, and many died hideous deaths underneath the mastery of the ancient warriors.

The battle lasted for nearly an hour before the Drakona retreated, satisfied they had done enough damage with their attack. While only a handful of true Solonavi and Drakona warriors were killed, nearly every Solonavi footsoldier in the camp bore wounds or burns from the vicious attack. The march to the Valley of the Gods would need to be delayed by another day, and reinforcements would need to be called for to face off against the two antagonistic dragonmen armies.

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### **Bloody Ledge - Late Winter, Day 29**

Following one of the wounded Drakona warriors, I soon found myself spying upon their encampment situated on a ledge overlooking the Crow Valley. While the Dragon City to the east boasts hundreds of Drakona warriors and tens of thousands of lizard and sub-human slaves, this warband only numbered about a dozen warriors, two less from last night's attacks. I partly expected to see the Draconum turncoat, Drakor, to be fighting alongside the Drakona battle force, but there were no outsiders present. Amidst the rocks some five hundred feet below, a column of upstart Draconum warriors searches for any sign of their primal ancestors, ready to confront and destroy them on sight.

The Drakona watch this with silence, secure in their safe spot as their dragon-cleric heals their wounds, one by one. While the process is lengthy, the cleric's work is very thorough, leaving no traces of wounds or even shattered scales after his work is complete. When all but two of the warriors are healed, an interesting thing happens on the rocks above their heads. A loud explosion sounds, a pop of air that reverberates and echoes for miles, followed by a sizable flare of bright green light that both blinds – and marks the site for observers from miles away.

As my scrying pool clears the brilliance, there is a strangled sound from within the waters, followed by a predatory hiss. When the picture returns, the lead Drakona, not yet healed of his wounds, has the spindly, cowardly Orc Shaman I saw from a couple of days ago caught in his clawed fist. The Orc tries desperately to get away, its little feet kicking in desperation, but with an exasperated roar, the Draconum crushes the creature's ribcage with raw strength, killing the screaming thing with its own shattered ribs.

The Draconum surge up the cliff face, using every last possible outcropping and handhold to propel themselves up the cliff. From above, blasting spells and balls of explosive fire begin to rain down upon the ledge, smashing both Drakona and stone into

pieces. Dropping from the ledge on outstretched wings, a couple of the Drakona glide down, latch onto the climbing Draconum with their claws, and rip them tumbling from the safety of the walls. One of the Drakona does not fare as well with this attempt, and is taken with their passenger in a long spiral to the valley floor.

Within minutes, the battle is over, and another dozen Draconum and Drakona lay dead in the rocks, and their comrades retreating in all directions. Soon, the crows will come, and claim their bloody feast.

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### **Fight or Flight** - Late Winter, Day 30

The humans and elves in the Solonavi's service ride at top speed across Crow Valley, with the Solonavi spirits following closely behind. Today, the warriors and mages loyal to the Solonavi are taking no chances, and their weapons and wands are at the ready.

The pass up to the Valley of the Gods was once washed away by a great cataclysm of water, a torrent that left a smooth trail more than a hundred yards wide leading from the valley floor up to the brim of the peaks. Up this trail the footsoldiers ride, hoping to gain the top of the pass before stopped by either Draconum or Drakona warriors can stop them. Taking a desperate gamble, I lock onto one of the lead riders, assuming that the Solonavi warriors will be engaged and slowed sooner than these fleet, lesser soldiers.

My gamble pays off – but not in the way that I expected. From ahead comes a wave of Draconum, Scalesworn, and loping Whelps, blocking the way into the Valley of the Gods. From above comes the Drakona, wheeling down with their spells and spears, screaming bloody challenge against all that stand against them. With a clash of metal and screaming horse my rider plows into, against, and through the Draconum lines, even as the rest of the footsoldiers are caught against the wall of scales and death.

Following orders, the rider leaves the battle behind, and seems for a few moments to not be followed by any of the predatory dragon-men. The warrior, a man of Khamsin riding a rare horse of Galeshi breed, rides as if his life depends upon his speed, for he knows the mere pistol and short sword he carries will not last long against the angry might of an enraged Draconum.

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