

Fall 435 Day 01

The Dragonslayers' Tomb

As Raven--or Tonen, or whatever her name was--suggested, I immediately showed her letter to Lord Vextha, who was less than amused. He immediately ordered that I search for her, and I retired to the Scrying Chamber to do so.

Calling upon the Scrying Eye was an incredible experience now that I could see the ghostly form of a Solonavi entering the room, and I could feel my sight merging with that of the Solonavi until I saw what it did. As soon as the connection was made, I bent my will towards finding the Amazon Swiftblade, the woman who had been my friend, but the Eye--despite knowing that it was the vision of a Solonavi I shared, I could not think of my guide as anything but the Scrying Eye--had other ideas, and I found myself whisked away far to the north and west, up the Roa Sein and through the Blasted Lands.

My vision focused on a long lake, tucked away amidst inhospitable mountains. Despite the advancing season, snow covered the ground, and ice ringed the waters of the mountain lake. The Eye took me to the end of the lake, where a cavern delved deep into the heart of the mountains to the north. Icicles ringed the entrance like the teeth of a great beast, but the Scrying Eye did not hesitate, sweeping quickly through the labyrinthine passages beyond the icy jaws until I saw before me a small room, the walls ornately carved with pictures, and four golden caskets lying side by side.

As I entered the chamber, my vision blurred, and I could feel the amulet about my neck, many days travel to the south, grow warm, and then hot. Still seeing the underground chamber before me, I grasped the chain which held the amulet close to my throat, and lifted the heated metal away from my skin. Immediately my vision cleared, and I could see the room clearly once again. My eyes first went to the caskets, and I saw that the tops of each were gone, as if they had never been there. At the foot of each casket, there was a symbol. On the largest, there was a staff, radiating lines that I could only assume were magic. The next largest had a pair of axes carved into the ancient gold of the coffin. The final two, of nearly equal size, were marked by a sword and oval shield, and a bow nocked with a flaming arrow. The caskets, however, were entirely empty.

It was then that I raised my eyes to the carvings on the walls. Although they were highly stylized, I was able to quickly follow the story they showed. Four beings: a spell-wielding dragon-man, an orc with two great axes, an elf armed with a sorcerous bow, and a man in full armor with sword and shield, gathered a small army of all four races, along with many of the others which now inhabit the Land. They led this army across burning wastelands, through the ruins of cities and across battlefields choked with dead, until they came to a valley ringed with mountains. The last wall had only two scenes upon it, the first of the army, still led by the four warriors, arrayed in battle against a cloud of darkness; and the second of the same four warriors standing amidst a field of slaughter, their forces destroyed, but their enemy defeated as well, and I could see that their defeated enemy was none other than the five-headed Dragon of the Apocalypse.

It appeared that I now stood in the tomb of the beings who had slain the Apocalypse Dragon the last time, the great warriors that the Amulet of Summoning was supposed to awaken, but they weren't there...

Fall 435 Day 02

Kastali Awakes: Kastali once again sets her thoughts and experiences down in the ledges of the Scrying Chamber.
Four to Combat One...

Chaos Spreading Throughout The Land...

The Land Fighting Against the Chaos, and Against Itself...

Fevered Dreams...

Suffering...

Death...

I awoke within the infirmary of the Tower of Rokos, agony searing through my body. An Oathsworn sat beside the table, keeping watch on me. As my eyes opened and I tried to sit up, he spoke. "Rest, Oracle. Your body and spirit are still recovering from your ordeal. I will find Lord Anquilis and inform him you are awake."

I collapsed back in the bed, more from the pain of my movement than from the Oathsworn's words. I tried reaching for the Eye, calling out to it, but the attempt brought nothing but another sharp shock of pain. Deciding not to risk that agony again, I simply lay back in my bed, awaiting the archivist's approach. Oracle Daheia accompanied Anquilis into the room, coming over to the side of my bed and resting a hand on my arm as she spoke. "Your mind and body have been sorely tried, Kastali. We did not anticipate such powerful resistance to your scrying from The Four. We will not set you to watching them again."

Confusion flooded me, "But Orac—Daheia, aren't they fighting the Apocalypse as the Solonavi do?"

It was Lord Anquilis who answered my question, a frown contorting his fiery countenance, "Although they fight the same enemy that we do, there are many methods to combat the evil that is the cult of the Apocalypse.

"We do not agree with their methods, and they do not agree with ours."
As I reflected on the words of the Tower archivist, the crimson rays of the setting sun cut through the room, filling the room with a warm red glow, and I suddenly realized I did not know what day it was.

As if sensing my question before I voiced it, Daheia spoke again, "You have been unconscious for several weeks, Kastali. It was feared you would not survive the

experience. It appears that the Dragonslayers of old still retain much of their formidable power."

"Weeks?" I could not believe ears... I had been rushing to discover what I could of the slayers of the Apocalypse Dragon, and now I had lost weeks.

Daheia once again patted my arm, "Take comfort, Kastali. Although we have not had the use of your skills, we are not without our own. Now rest, and quietly. Our other patient has only recently been able to leave the Seatower for more comfortable lodgings here in the infirmary, and we do not wish for her rest to be disturbed."

My eyes sought the shape of the other patient, for finally my curiosity would be sated with the identity of the inhabitant of Seatower. To my consternation, I found myself meeting gazes with Desmanda, the paramour of the renegade Atlantean Rayden Marz, and even more disturbingly, the unblinking eyes which met mine were carved of living red magestone.

Fall 435 Day 03

What had driven Desmanda to seek refuge in the Tower of Rokos? As far as I knew, neither she nor Rayden Marz served the Solonavi—or at least, they had not until now, for I could not imagine what Desmanda must have promised the Solonavi in exchange for them implanting precious magestone into her barren eye sockets. I would have given anything to ask the red-eyed magus about her new eyes, but I obeyed Daheia's order not to bother my silent companion.

I slept fitfully, as images that seemed vaguely familiar flashed through my mind: an ork with twin axes and the skull of a drakona on his head fighting alongside a human with a sword, shield and archaic armor; humans and elves kneeling before the Domina Vo'kara of the Shyft; draconum in chains, being dragged behind wagons driven by Preceptor Nala's modern-day Tu'raj; and strangely, amidst the dark and terrible visions, a small goblin sitting atop a shining shield with a hulking orc standing behind him, setting a circlet of steel atop his head. When I awoke, I felt much refreshed, despite my disturbing dreams. As there were no attendants outside of a pair of drones, I arose from my bed, dressed, and made my way back to the Scrying Chamber. I had spent nearly an hour there, clearing things up, checking the material on the bookshelf and looking for changes in the map hung on the wall, when I suddenly felt the presence of another. I spun towards the source of the feeling, reaching for the sword that was no longer at my side, only to find myself face to face with a figure wearing a full face-mask and a dulled golden breastplate over a long maroon coat.

The voice that spoke from behind the mask was strangely distorted, echoing hollowly as if from the depths of a well, "Lord Heddravalis tasked me with watching you for a time, Oracle." Despite the use of my title, there was little respect in the tone—for that matter, there was little emotion of any kind. "The Masters do not wish for you to come to harm while you are still recovering."

I nodded, a bit shocked that anyone could have simply appeared from nowhere in such a small room. Glancing over the slim form, I recognized the man by the violet blades of sorcerous fire jutting from his bracers, "If Lord Heddravalis insists, Seeker Mock, I will not disobey. Just stay out of my way."

The Seeker's answering laugh had a sardonic ring to it, but I turned my back on the coarse man, focusing my attention on the scrying pool in the center of the room. I tried to connect with the Solonavi who served as the Scrying Eye, but even with the assistance of the pool I could not. When I looked up from my efforts, Seeker Mock had disappeared again. I spent some time pretending to study the pool while I attempted to spot him once more, but the assassin did not cooperate, and remained out of my sight.

By evening, I was thoroughly frustrated, unable to either find my newly-appointed guardian or contact the Scrying Eye, and I returned to my quarters for the night, resolving to find a way to use the Eye once more in the morning.

Fall 435 Day 04

I could have asked Oracle Daheia or any of the Solonavi inhabiting the Tower for assistance connecting with the Scrying Eye, but I felt I had something to prove after having been knocked senseless by the Dragonslayers and having a minder assigned to me. I was determined to succeed without help.

The day did not start off well, however, as I opened the door of my quarters to face the nearly featureless golden mask of Seeker Mock. The sneak-thief did not speak, but merely stepped out of the way, allowing me to precede him down the hallway to the Scrying Chamber. I was a dozen paces down the hall before I realized that I could not hear the Seeker's footsteps, and whirled to find nothing but an empty hallway. Looking about, I could not find the man, but when I turned to continue on my way to the Chamber, I nearly ran into him.

The annoying little man had seemingly appeared from thin air once more, and he had the nerve to bow in a manner that was clearly mocking and gesture towards the Scrying Chamber as if impatient.

Anger seethed within me, but I managed to return his bow with a regal nod of my head and stride off ahead of him once again. Once ensconced in the Scrying Chamber, I spent several hours struggling to find the Scrying Eye with only a raging headache to show for it. I had not seen Mock since entering the room, but when I left for the midday meal, I caught a glimpse of him out of the corner of my eye. At first I felt a surge of pride at having spotted the killer, but then I noticed the arrogant angle at which his hooded head was cocked, and nearly snarled aloud as I realized he had allowed me to see him once more.

Returning to the Scrying Chamber, I thrust the irritation of the Seeker's presence from my mind, and after several hours was finally able to concentrate on opening a connection to the Scrying Eye. Although I was unable to see the Solonavi approach, I felt the pull of the Scrying Eye, and let it take me away from the chamber about me.

Reveling in the Eye's pull, I set my mind to Rayden Marz, and let it pull me away to the north and west. To my surprise, the Solonavi did not stop anywhere near the renegade Atlantean's sky-fortress, but instead I saw before me a small collection of rude huts somewhere in the hills where Prieska becomes the Blasted Lands. Orcs filled the group of shanties that I hesitate to call a village, patrolling the outskirts and fighting and brawling in the center of the village, as is their wont.

I was unsure why the Scrying Eye had pulled me to this seeming backwater, until I caught sight of some small movement on one of the cliffs overlooking the huts. Swooping low over it, I saw the wiry form of a Golem Familiar in the colors of the Golemcore skulking about, keeping watch on the orc encampment. It did not stay long, but quickly scampered away with its tail whipping behind it, leaving me to follow, curious at why an Atlantean golem might be so far from any other Atlanteans. The Familiar turned a corner into a draw canyon, and there before me was an Atlantean military camp, with warriors and golems in the bronze and purple of the Golemcore filling the small area with military might.

In the center of the camp, Anunub directed the organized chaos of the camp. The Golemcore magus was easily identifiable by the heavy gearwork of his artificial arm, a keepsake of an assassination attempt masterminded by Grand Magus Osiris. The Golem Familiar slunk up to Anunub's feet, winding around his ankles like a cat or large rat might. The magus bent low, placing a palm on the construct's forehead. The magestones set in his forehead gleamed brightly for a moment, then the Golemcore leader straightened once more, announcing to a Kore Gunner standing beside him, "It is time. Tonight, we hunt orc."

Confident that I could find the Atlanteans easily enough whenever I wished, I directed the Scrying Eye back to the orc huts. The activity there was calming down for the night, but one figure stood out in the center of the village, speaking with several hulking half-trolls. It was Bloodhawk, Chaos Shaman, mutilator of Desmanda, and mortal enemy of Rayden Marz.

Fall 435 Day 05

The Kore of Combat

Knowing that Anunub's assault would take place after dark, I called for an Oathsworn and requested that my dinner be brought to the Scrying Chamber so that I could observe the fight without interruption. I neither asked nor cared if Seeker Mock would get hungry in the intervening time... maybe if the vexing Seeker got hungry, he would leave me alone for a while.

Guiding the Scrying Eye back to the orc encampment, I could see that the Atlanteans hadn't attacked yet as the green-skinned marauders still lazed about the camp, throwing bone dice, brawling, or otherwise amusing themselves. I settled my point of view above the camp, where I would have a good view of the upcoming battle and could also see the bluff where the Golem Familiar had been lurking earlier. Hours passed, the food I ordered grew cold, and I began to fear that Anunub's force was destined to strike another force of orcs than the one I watched. When the assault came, it was with a suddenness I had not previously seen from the Golemcore. It began with a half-dozen Kore Gunners creeping up along the rim of the cliff, then launching a volley of small objects down into the camp. The projectiles shattered in booming explosions when they struck in the camp, knocking down tents and sending orcs and goblins scattering. Under cover of this confusion, a quartet of Atlanteans carrying multi-barreled disruptors sprang up from their places of concealment at the base of the cliff and sprayed the orc camp with incandescent arcs of lightning.

The battle was not entirely one-sided, however, as a pair of orcs so covered in iron plates as to barely be recognizable as orcs came charging from the ruins of one hut. The Disruptors focused their attention on the two iron-clad orcs, but were only able to bring one down before the other reached them, smashing two of the humans down with crushing blows from a pair of hammers before it too was killed by Atlantean gunnery.

The assault of the Ironclads had bought the orcs the time they needed to re-organize, however. Bloodhawk strode through the camp, a hunk of magestone in one hand, blasting away at any movement along the edge of the valley with bolts of purple magic with his other. Several orc witches supported him, one channeling a torrent of healing magic into the Shaman, repairing the damage even as the magestone caused it. A solid wedge of Magestone Golems was met by a wave of frenzied orcs, bits of magestone crunching between their teeth. Dozens of the orcs were slaughtered in the first moment of collision, but those who remained pulled down golem after golem. It was then that the Maelstrom Golems came into play—fearsome engines of destruction with long arms ending in a trio of wicked claws. They cut a swathe through the orc warriors, and in their wake came Anunub himself, firing blasts of pure technomantic magic at the green-skinned fighters left alive by the bronze-armored behemoths. The magus-led Golems headed directly for the center of the compound where Bloodhawk directed the defenses, seemingly intent on coming to grips with the leader of the orc resistance.

Fall 435 Day 06

Caging the Hawk

As the night passed its midpoint, the battle still raged in the encampment of the Chaos Shaman Bloodhawk. The orc war-leader cut down a Combat Magus who dared close with him, and then let loose a sorcerous blast that blasted a nearby Infantry Golem apart. The skin on his left arm began to peel away from his flesh, rolling down towards the blazing chunk of magestone in his left hand. Bloodhawk bellowed as the Nal-Khan Witch dancing behind him channeled her healing magic into him, the gray-green skin of his arm unrolling itself and meshing back into place once more.

The leader of the Chaos Shaman was decimating his attackers, but Anunub's phalanx of Maelstrom Golems continued to close the gap. The Witch defending Bloodhawk stepped forward to face the first one, and was thrown a good dozen feet by an almost casual sweep of one clawed arm, the monstrous golem not even missing a step as it dealt with the last threat between the magus and the shaman. With a wave of Anunub's bronze staff, the golems parted, leaving the two sorcerers facing one another across a short expanse of charred and torn ground. Bloodhawk's snarl was audible even from beneath the bird-skull mask he wore, and it was the orc who made the first move. Casting aside the magestone in his left hand, Bloodhawk threw himself forward, a deep purple nimbus surrounding him as he rushed forward, firing blast after blast of blazing magical fire at the Golemcore magus as he charged. Anunub stood firm, thrusting forth the staff in his right hand, and the magical assault rolling off the human's defenses like rain from a metal roof. A hut behind Anunub, hit by one of the magical bolts, burst into flames, lighting the scene with a flickering blaze of shadow and light.

As the orc closed in, Anunub spun out of the way, dancing more awkwardly, although no less effectively, than a Sect pitfighter. Anunub's bronze left arm came around, striking the shaman full force on the back of his head as the orc stumbled by. Already hurting from his role in the defense of the encampment, Bloodhawk nearly fell, but whirled about, facing the Atlantean. The two magic-users circled each other slowly, and the orc growled from beneath his mask, "Why do you seek me out, Bronze-arm? We both hate Marz, and we could work together to destroy him."

Anunub feinted with his staff, cutting off Bloodhawk's words and causing the orc to shift his blade out to one side to defend against the threat. While the shaman was still off-balance, the magus struck with the speed of a cobra, latching his bronze fingers about the orc's throat and lifting him inches off the ground. A wave of pain washed over me, and my vision started to go black. Before my connection to the Scrying Eye dissolved entirely, however, I heard Anunub's response to Bloodhawk's offer, "Who says I hate Rayden Marz, orc? You will make a fine peace offering to him."

When I came to, I awoke to a most unpleasant sight—Seeker Mock's flat golden mask staring down at me. However, a woman in maroon, purple, and gold and wearing a half-mask was also there, and it was she who spoke, her voice mellifluous and regal, "You are pushing yourself too hard, Oracle. My healing will allow you to return to your quarters for the rest of the night, but I would suggest that you not remain connected to the Scrying Eye for so long until you are fully recovered."

As the woman I now recognized as Elydia turned to leave, she paused, remarking off-handedly, "If Mock had not come get me as quickly as he did, you might be in a much less comfortable place, Oracle. You should be thankful you have such a minder as him."

I thought hard on Elydia's final words to me as I made my way back to my quarters, with the long-coated Seeker Mock following behind me, thankfully remaining fully visible the entire trip. Was Mock merely an annoyance, or could he prove useful...?

Fall 435 Day 07

Upon waking, I once more made my way to the Scrying Chamber and found a neat breakfast of fruits and cheese laid out beside the bookshelf, although I certainly had not ordered anything. Perhaps Seeker Elydia had seen fit to ensure that I maintained my health. Connecting once more with the Scrying Eye brought a brief flash of pain, but nothing comparable to what I experienced during my time in the blood pits of Necropolis.

Apparently I had been able to direct the Solonavi currently serving as the Scrying Eye to stay with Anunub before I collapsed last night, because when I reached through the Scrying Pool to connect with it, I found myself instantly looking upon Anunub at the head of his column. They appeared to be traveling south and east, into the heart of Prieska. Despite the fierce battle with Bloodhawk's orcs, the column still numbered some two dozen humans and thirty-to-forty golems, and I had the sneaking suspicion that there were more golems scattered about as scouts and guards.

Directly behind Anunub, two drehj labored over the rough terrain. Remembering encounters with the beasts at the head of Atlantean Rams before, I was glad that the Scrying Eye allowed me to see and hear events, but not smell them. Thick chains

ran from the creatures' harnesses back to a most pitiful sight. Without his mask, cape, and armor, Bloodhawk was an orc sunken in upon himself. He was dusty, dirty, battered, and bruised from being dragged across the ground when he fell, and his shoulders slumped in defeat.

Even as I watched, one of the orc's feet caught on a protruding rock, and he tumbled to the ground. The drehj continued their serene, steady pace despite the increased resistance. In fact, one of the ornery beasts started to plod off at an angle, dragging the shaman faster across the ground as the chains holding him tightened. An enormous golem with a crossbow mounted on one arm noticed that Bloodhawk had fallen, and stepped in, hauling the orc back to his feet with one huge, clawed hand. Although the Golem was none-to-gentle in lifting the Chaos Shaman up, it was evident that Anunub wanted Bloodhawk intact when he delivered him to Rayden Marz.

I was brought back to the Scrying Chamber by an insistent knocking at the door. Opening it, I found Mahdi the page outside with a cup of stew and a heel of bread. I took the food from him, frowning about the room as I closed the door. As my head turned back to an area of the room I had just scanned, I found myself looking at the dark figure of Seeker Mock. Keeping myself from jumping, I frowned gravely at him. The only response I got from the blade-thin figure was a shrug, and the hollow words, "Seeker Elydia said you needed to watch your health." I looked down at my food, then back up, anger flaming across my face, but he was gone as if he had never been present. Calming slowly, I forced myself to take my time eating, not willing to give the obnoxious Seeker the satisfaction of watching me hurry.

Chewing idly on the bread, I stepped back to the Scrying Pool, regaining my connection with the Solonavi watching Anunub's train of men and machines just in time to see them crest a hill and look out over a valley dominated by Rayden Marz's sky-castle. Almost immediately, a trio of men on Dragonflies buzzed low over the column, their weapons at the ready.

One landed before the Magus, a manaclevt and a fuser pistol clenched in his hands, "What do you want, Magus? Be quick, or you will never live to report what you see below." The jerk of the man's head made it obvious that he meant the grounded sky-castle sheltered within the valley.

Anunub's smile was filled with self-assured confidence, and he reached slowly into the saddleback of one of the drehj, withdrawing a mass of feathers and bone. He then urged the two beasts apart, speaking to the outrider as he held up Bloodhawk's mask in his left hand, "I come to parley with your commander. I have brought him a gift that I believe he wants most desperately."

Rayden Marz's man looked from the newly-revealed orc to the mask in the magus' hand, then nodded shortly, "I believe you will have the General's attention, Magus. Wait here, and I will take your message to him."

Fall 435 Day 08

It did not take long for Raydan Marz's outrider to return with the warlord's invitation for Anunub to join him within the rogue Atlantean's sky-castle. The Magus directed his men to make camp on the hill where they were stopped, and started down into

the valley, accompanied only by Marz's messenger, two Magestone Golems, and the two drehj dragging the orc prisoner.

As Anunub walked boldly into the den of the Lion of Prieska, I did what I could to scan Raydan Marz's defenses. The warlord had repeatedly refused the offers of the Solonavi, and I felt certain that Lord Vextha would like very much to know how he defended his mobile base of operations. Unfortunately, I could discern little, as the Atlantean's patrols were either too well hidden or too scarce for me to spot. I focused my attention on Anunub as he entered the sky-castle, and although my vision was blurred and I began to get a low-level headache from my proximity to the huge chunks of magestone at the base of the castle, I was able to follow him inside the fortress.

Bloodhawk was immediately taken to a dungeon, escorted by the two Golems, while Anunub was led up to the top of one of the gatehouse towers. Waiting for the young Magus was one of the most sought-after men in the Land, Raydan Marz himself. The former Atlantean had his manaclevt and lightning pistol nearby, but did not seem to be worried at the intrusion of the Magus. "I have not seen you for some time, Anunub." The warlord's voice was rough, perhaps with the pain of revisiting painful memories, "I believe you were on the tribunal set to determine whether I was a traitor to Atlantis." Although Marz managed to keep his voice somewhat light, the muscles of his jaw clenched, "You voted against me, as I recall."

Anunub did not seem put off by this harsh reception, however, responding quickly and confidently, "I did as I was ordered. I have come to you with an offer."

Raydan Marz barked a short, sharp laugh, "Really? I do appreciate your delivery of the orc swine. I would have preferred to capture him myself, but this is certainly more convenient. I hope that this is not all you planned to offer me, however..." The older man left the words hanging in the air, but he had not fallen silent long before Anunub answered.

"Not at all, General. You have been fighting a cancer at the heart of the Atlantean Empire for a long time now, but you are not fighting the right enemy." Raydan Marz made as if to interrupt, but Anunub held up his bronze mechanical arm in a gesture begging for patience, and Marz fell silent once more. "Emperor Nujarek was not the one who ordered me to find you guilty, Raydan Marz, it was Osiris. I would offer you the assistance of the Golemkore, if you can accept what I say to be true."

Marz paused for a long moment, obviously thinking the offer over, and when he replied, his voice was cautious and calculating, "We shall see, Magus. I do not think that Jeet Nujarek is blameless, but it may be that Osiris is the larger threat to Atlantis. I will work with you and yours, but you have not yet gained my trust. You will have to do more than kill orcs and make vague promises to do that."

Fall 435 Day 09

When I drew back from the Scrying Pool, the room was dark, lit only by the golden radiance of a Solonavi Striker. Bowing my head, I never-the-less recognized Heddravalis, one of the integral players in the search for the shards of the Amulet of Summoning that I now wore around my neck. "Lord Heddravalis, it is an honor."

The Solonavi's words echoed in my brain, "You have done well, Oracle, to recover the use of the Scrying Sight so soon, but do not push yourself. I have need of Seeker Mock for other duties, but I will not have you rendering yourself useless to us."

Sinking my head deeper obediently, I responded, "As you command, Lord Heddravalis. I will not strain myself." Inside, however, I exulted; as I would not have to deal with Seeker Mock any more. The Striker paused a moment, studying me for a long moment as if he could feel what I was thinking, then turned and left, gliding through the door and out of the Scrying Chamber. An instant later, Seeker Mock materialized before my eyes, appearing from thin air beside the book-case. As if in imitation of the Solonavi before him, the Seeker paused, his golden mask facing me for a long moment.

"I will return, Oracle. Once the Oath-breaker has been punished, I will return." With that, the assassin disappeared in a whirl of maroon cloth, and I was once more alone in the Scrying Chamber.

I pondered calling for supper, but decided to take one more look into the Scrying Pool. Once more, I was looking down upon the valley that hid Raydan Marz's sky-castle, and I could see the tail end of Anunub's column entering the gates of the fortress. In the courtyard inside, members of Raydan Marz's renegade force met with comrades of years past, catching up on old times. Despite the seemingly warm reception, however, there was a hesitancy on both sides, a wariness that did not fade even as the members of the Golemkore took up residence within Marz's sky-castle.

Fall 435 Day 10

The morning dawned cold, the first hints of winter coming early this year. Wrapping myself in a cloak, I made my way to the Scrying Chamber. When I arrived, there was a note from Lord Vextha directing that I look in on events around the fortress of Stonekeep. I glanced about, half expecting a breakfast to be waiting for me, but found nothing. Apparently, Seeker Elydia had gone with Mock to do Lord Heddravalis' bidding and was no longer watching over me so carefully.

Although I was interested in what would become of Raydan Marz and Anunub's tenuous alliance, I was more than happy to direct my attention over the Wylden and see how the Dark Crusade fared. As I connected with the Scrying Eye and directed the Solonavi spirit over the Atlantean Empire, across the Roa Galtor, and into the Wylden, I was surprised at the changes that had occurred. Although armed camps of Dark Crusaders still dotted the landscape, much of the forest was recovering. When last I viewed the verdant foliage from above, it was spotted and scarred with a multitude of flame-scorched holes, and now many of them had begun to grow back, the Land itself slowly recovering from the scourging we of the Dark Crusade had given it on our way to the fortress of Roanne Valle.

I bent my thoughts on the fortress of Stonekeep, and the Scrying Eye dove up the South Pass and towards the ancient fortress. It shopped short, however, and dove down to where a large forest rose up into the foothills of the Sturnmounts at the cap of the valley. Tearing through the canopy, I found my sight centered in a small clearing where the rock of the mountains met the underbrush of the forest. Two Elven Lords in full plate-and-chain stood within the glen. The woman looked agitated, turning her head from side to side with a frequency that sent the white horse-hair plume atop her helmet swaying violently. She did not speak, but continued to dart

glances towards her companion, who stood in regal calm, his long braid and blue cloak unmoving.

I did not have to wait long to see why they risked an encounter with Dark Crusader patrols in this remote region, for a pair of figures melted out of the edge of the forest, moving slowly so as not to surprise the pair already present. Their cautious approach reminded me bitterly of the suddenness with which my erstwhile minder, Seeker Mock, had appeared and disappeared before my very eyes. As the two Elven Lords recognized their new companions, the male greeted the centaur who approached them, nodding politely, "Councillor Laurell, it is an honor. I do not believe I have the pleasure of meeting your companion, but this," he gestured towards the female elf behind him who now grasped the hilt of the shortsword at her side, "is Rivvenguard Jaysa, a staunch friend and loyal companion."

Laurell sank into a graceful bow that bent her front legs and dipped her humanoid torso low to the ground, "I am honored as well, Lord Jamus, Rivvenguard Jaysa. I present to you High Priestess Kess, a true warrior of the Land." One lithe arm gestured to the Wylden elf accompanying her, "I thank you for coming to meet us."

Lord Jamus's answering smile was broad and seemed genuine, "How could I resist such a tempting offer? The idea of the Elven Lords and the Wylden Host joining forces to strike against the Dark Crusade is most interesting."

Fall 435 Day 11

Council Lord Jamus and Councillor Laurell spent the morning speaking quietly, both phrasing their words with the utmost care and displaying perfect polite manners towards one another. It was obvious that this alliance would have some bad blood to overcome if it were to succeed. Throughout the conference, Lord Jamus often glanced over to High Priestess Kess, as if expecting the Wylden elf to assume control of the Elemental side of the discussion, and his Rivvenguard protector seemed quite uncomfortable with the idea of an elf standing silent while a centaur spoke, directing vaguely disgusted glances to the raven-haired half-woman, much as a Necromancer would if a zombie had sat down at the table and begun discussing politics with him.

I expected this to break down the talks, but Laurell carried on her end of the conversation with silent grace and pride, either not noticing the discomfort of the Rivvenheimers or ignoring it. Despite the unease of the Elven Lords, the two sides parted amicably just short of mid-day, with Council Lord Jamus requesting that Kess remain behind a moment when the two Elementals turned to leave. As Councillor Laurell moved off to the edge of the glen, Jamus turned away from the centaur and spoke to the Wylden elf in low tones, "Why did you hold back from the discussion, High Priestess? Do you feel that you have gained something from me by forcing me to parley with your guard?"

Kess seemed most surprised at this suggestion, laughing lightly as she replied, "Honored Lord, with all due respect, I am the Councillor's guard. She sits on the Council of Five, not I, and she directs the will of the Wylden Host. If you will excuse me, Lord Jamus." With that, she bowed her way out of the Elven Lord's presence, leaving both Rivvenheim elves standing shocked in the center of the clearing.

Although I was amused at the discomfort of the elves, I was not pleased with the agreement they had reached. I know my place, and would not think of doing so, but my heart yearned to warn my fellows of the Dark Crusade that a force of the

Wylden Host would be traveling through the Rivvenheims to join with an army of Elven Lords and strike at the Vurgra Divide and the rear of the Black Lake.

Fall 435 Day 12

Still pondering what affect this new alliance between the Elven Lords and Elemental Freeholds might have on the might of the Dark Crusaders, I went down to find something to eat, as no food had been brought up to the Scrying Chamber. I was beginning to miss the fact that Seeker Elydia had departed with Mock when I nearly ran into her in the hallway. She paused, studying my expression for a moment, and then inquired, "You seem surprised, Oracle. May I inquire as to why?" Flushing slightly, I responded, "I assumed that you had left with Seeker Mock, since you were part of the same team of Seekers previously."

Elydia shook her head, "No, Seeker Mock's task required his specialized skills, but not mine," the statuesque woman held up a hand to forestall my next question, "Nor those of Seeker Azruk, Oracle, although it is not your business to ask." Inclining my head, I thanked Elydia and continued on towards the kitchens, my mind awl. If Elydia was still in the Tower, she likely had not simply decided to stop sending food up to the Scrying Chamber. This led me to a most perplexing conundrum: someone else within the Tower of Rokos knew of my recent injuries, had been taking an interest in my well-being, and had since stopped doing so.

Briefly, I toyed with the idea that it might have been Seeker Mock himself having the food brought up to the Scrying Chamber, but I quickly discarded that possibility, as the annoying little man had done nothing to demonstrate any interest in me besides taunting me with his ability to vanish at will. My time with the Dark Crusade had taught me to be wary of those who knew of my weaknesses, so I would have to find out who else knew that I had been vulnerable, before they used that knowledge against me.

Fall 435 Day 13

Once again, the day dawned cold and clear, the tang of winter thick upon the air. Interested in learning more about what the Elven Lords were doing in preparation for their alliance with the Wylden Host, I directed the Scrying Eye over the foothills of the Rivvenheims. Around the North Pass, I found numerous camps filled with snow centaurs and elves, apparently waiting for the time to strike down into the lowlands and into the forces of the Dark Crusade arrayed below.

Most camps were relatively small, with only a few elves and a tribe of snow centaurs, but I found one that was different far southwards, at the tip of the peninsula of rock jutting out into South Pass. This camp was filled with Skymages with their wings wrapped tightly about them to ward off the cold, Cloud Warriors wearing their heavy tabards, and mages of the Order of Sorcery. At the center of the camp was a large tent, and within it I found an even greater surprise: an elf in a wolf-fur cape, another in a cloak of blue with falcon's feathers adorning his helm and arm-guards, and a green and orange Draconum arrayed in armor of obvious elven craftsmanship.

"You are sure of what your companion has seen, Falconer?" It was the Draconum who spoke, his hissing tones filling the tent despite its size.

The feathered elf nodded once, one hand reaching out to caress the head of a beautiful raptor perched nearby, "My friend has never been wrong before. The Dark Crusaders gather at Stonekeep. If we cut them off here, at the base of the pass, our companions should be able to strike hard and take the fortress back. It can be done, Miraxus."

The second elf present broke in, obviously impatient, "We waste our time striking against Stonekeep. We should be breaking out into the lowlands to strike against the real threat. The Tu'raj and the Darkmarch are on the attack, and I believe that those guiding them have knowledge that they should not."

Miraxus made a calming gesture with his clawed hands, his wings beating slowly in the cold mountain air, "Peace, Longblade. Without Stonekeep, our flank is not secure. With the Fortress, we can move down into the lowlands without danger. Our ultimate aim is not lost, but before we strike against the forces of the Apocalypse, we must crush the Dark Crusade."

Fall 435 Day 14

Whether or not Miraxus, Geddion Longblade, and Keldane Falconer were aiming their forces at the Dark Crusade in the long term, I knew that they could do a great deal of damage in the short term. If they were able to take Stonekeep, the Elemental Freeholders would be able to join with the Elven Lords and easily march into the Rivvenheims without traversing the Sturnmounts as well.

Although I could do nothing to help them, I decided to see how the Dark Crusaders were preparing to meet the coming onslaught. Directing the Scrying Eye down from the spur of mountains jutting into the Wylden and into South Pass, I quickly found a large encampment of Crusaders in the center of the valley. The camp looked like it held easily twice the number of warriors as the camp of the Elven Lords that I had just left, but even as I watched, a thick column of Crusaders, Vampires, and Zombies began the long march up the pass towards Stonekeep. Evidently, the commander of the Crusader camp did not know that it was about to be attacked.

The attack came shortly after midday, after the column had passed out of sight, and began with a flight of Skymages lifting on white wings from within a nearby copse of trees. Several immediately loosed blasts of magical power into the camp of the Dark Crusaders, hanging back to cover the diving approach of their fellows. The encampment boiled like a kicked anthill under the sudden assault. Most of the Skymages' blasts were blocked by shields of magic that sprang up before them, but several found their way through, shattering walking corpses and blasting apart mortal warriors.

The chaos created by this aerial assault kept the attention of the Dark Crusaders long enough for the ground assault to strike home. Geddion Longblade and Keldane Falconer led the charge in person, the fur-clad elf hacking at his enemies with a single-minded fury and the feather-adorned elf dancing amidst his foes, leaving them to slash his billowing blue cloak if their weapons caught any part of him at all. The charge of the Elven Lords was met by a solid wave of zombies, but the ponderous undead were no match for the martial skill of the Rivvenheimers. It was

not until the pitfighters and Vampires of the Necropolis hit the elven lines that the attack faltered.

Even as the elves on the ground began to slow, Cloud Warriors and Skymages swooped down towards the camp of the Dark Crusaders, with Miraxus at their head. Vampires rose up to meet the new threat, accompanied by pitfighters and undead creations upon dark-winged pegasi. The sheer weight of the defenders threatened to overwhelm the attackers, but none could come within the reach of the fearsome Draconum's weapons and survive. Behind the apparently unstoppable guard of Miraxus, the Cloud Warriors and Skymages joined their companions on the ground, reinforcing the wavering lines.

The tide of battle looked to be turning towards the Elven Lords once again, when suddenly their flank was thrown into disarray. I quickly sent the Scrying Eye winging over in that direction, and I saw a solid wedge of Blood Cult Enforcers striking the elven lines, with none other than Mortifier Carlana at their head. Although the assault of the Elven Lords had done a large amount of damage to the Dark Crusaders and had breached the perimeter of their encampment, it looked as if the elite of the elves would be dragged down and join the ranks of the zombies still shuffling about the battlefield.

Fall 435 Day 15

With the elven assault getting bogged down and the elite of the Blood Cult striking them from the flank, it looked as if the forces led by Keldane Falconer, Miraxus, and Geddion Longblade would be unable to survive for long.

A half-dozen pitfighters kept Miraxus busy, leaping and darting about the armored Draconum, unable to pierce his defenses, but quick enough to avoid the ferocious sweeps of his heavy blade. Geddion Longblade was being assaulted on all sides by wave after wave of zombies, his two-handed sword striking down one after another seemingly without effort, but despite their losses the undead continued to surround the elven warrior. Mortifier Carlana found herself facing Keldane Falconer, the two experienced warriors circling one another warily. Other combatants kept well away from the two, despite the press of bodies, not willing to get within reach of them.

The Mortifier was the first to attack, her impatient nature showing through as she broke the impasse, striking out with a bolt of dark magic, but the elf was not there. Spinning away, Keldane Falconer struck like a stooping raptor, his curved blade rising in a graceful arc that Carlana barely parried with the haft of her bladed staff. For a long moment the two heroes stood face to face, barely a foot apart. Their slim forms strained against one another, the Mortifier's smooth, pale flesh and black leather adornments a stark contrast to the blue and steel of Keldane's armor. Just as I thought Carlana would break the press once again, the Falconer slipped from the clench, the feathers adorning one arm flaring out to brush against the Mortifier's thigh. The contact was not a soft one, however, as steel glittered beneath the feathers and blood sprouted where they touched skin. Keldane Falconer laughed loudly as he pirouetted away, the sound ringing over the clash of arms.

Mortifier Carlana snarled at the dancing elf, baring her fangs and wiping one hand over the smear of blood trailing down her thigh. She brought the crimson-stained fingers up, examining them for a moment before turning her attention back to the elf who had the audacity to challenge her. Then the Mortifier's eyelids fluttered, and her knees sagged, the flesh around the cut almost immediately swelling and turning a vibrant red as some Rivvenheim poison made its way into her system. Keldane

Falconer started forward to finish Darq's mistress then, but Carlana's phalanx of Cult Enforcers closed in, blocking him away. I looked the battle over once more, looking to see whether or not the Crusaders would fall apart with their leader out of the fight, but they seemed not to notice, intent on destroying the elite elven assault force now trapped within their ranks.

My attention was distracted then by a sounding of horns from the forest behind the Crusader encampment. I directed the Scrying Eye in that direction, and I saw a force of centaurs armored with ironwood leading other centaurs wreathed in magic towards the Dark Crusaders. Behind the centaurs came shambling beasts of rock and plant with the torsos and heads of Wylden elves emerging from their shoulders. I recognized these creatures from descriptions I had heard as Darkling Symbiotes, combinations of elf and elemental construct fearsome on the field of battle. As the centaurs cleared a path through the Dark

Crusaders guarding the rear of the camp, and the Symbiotes surged forward, I recognized two figures standing at the edge of the forest: High Priestess Kess and Councillor Laurell.

Fall 435 Day 16

With the addition of the centaurs and symbiotes of the Wylden Host to the fray, the Elven Lords broke out from the tight circle the Crusader attacks had battered them into. As the pressure on the elven lines lessened, the leaders of the strike force fought their way free.

Miraxus burst back into the air, scattering the pitfighters gathered around him as he launched himself into the aerial fray. The orange-striped Draconum reached out, plucking a pitfighter off her pegasus and throwing her to the ground below as he soared upwards. He had been stung and slowed by numerous small wounds, but he still wheeled and swooped among the fighters in the air.

Geddion Longblade finally fought his way through the press of zombies about him, bowling over a Vampire and decapitating it with an almost casual slash of his heavy blade. The elf was covered in gore, and his luxurious wolf-skin cloak was torn and his armor scratched and dented, but he fought his way through the ranks of the Dark Crusaders with a fury matched only by the fiercest of vampires.

Keldane Falconer struggled against a half-dozen Cult Enforcers, deftly ducking and dodging the ponderous swings of their giant hammers, but unable to land a telling blow on any of them due to the effort required to avoid their attacks. He cut down one, two, but still he could not escape from the circle of hammer-wielding fanatics.

While a group of Enforcers held off the Falconer, another few Crusaders pulled the comatose body of Mortifier Carlana away from the fight, a pair of Necromancers attending closely. The armored centaurs crashed into the Crusader lines, running down their opponents and cracking a hole in the defenses. Eight Darkling Symbiotes strode into this gap, tendrils of plant matter congealing from one arm as giant boulders were extruded from the other. Using the tendrils to bind their foes and the boulders to shatter them, the symbiotes waded into the center of the Crusader camp, shattering the last of the resistance between them and the remaining elves.

An hour or so later, High Priestess Kess, Councillor Laurell, Keldane Falconer, Geddion Longblade, and Miraxus met in the wreckage of what had once been a large Dark Crusader camp. Behind the Elven Lords and the Draconum, the elven strike force

gathered, staring past the Priestess and centaur towards the ranks of the Wylden Host. There was a long, tense moment, then Keldane Falconer stepped forward, extending a hand to Kess and clasping her wrist, "It is good to see you once again, Kess."

A smile bloomed on the High Priestess' face, and she nodded, "Good indeed, Keldane. I am impressed, your force might have even won through without the aid of the Host."

The Falconer laughed lightly, shrugging aside the backhanded compliment, and gesturing behind him, "May I present Geddion Longblade, and Miraxus. They share the command of this force with me."

Kess nodded to each in turn, then inclined her head towards the centaur archer with her, "This is Councillor Laurell." Geddion, Keldane, and Miraxus bowed to the centaur in turn, and she returned the gesture with a regal nod. Kess continued, "What do you intend now, Keldane?"

The Falconer stepped back, raising one arm, and a majestic falcon swooped down and alighted on his gauntlet, "Even my friend's sharp eyes have been unable to find the Mortifier, so we must assume that she escaped. Despite that, our next goal is clear, and with your assistance, it is a sure thing." The elf paused for a moment, a smile stealing across his face beneath his beaked helm, "Now Stonekeep will fall to us once again."

Fall 435 Day 17

After spending some time speaking with people throughout the Tower of Rokos and trying in vain to find out who else knew of my late weakness, I returned the Scrying Eye to South Pass to look in on the elven assault upon Stonekeep. Several of the elven and snow centaur camps from the surrounding mountains had emptied to refill the ranks of Miraxus, Keldane Falconer, and Geddion Longblade's army, and combined with a healthy number of Elemental warriors, the besieging force was certainly strong enough to threaten the defenders of Stonekeep, if not overwhelm them entirely.

The fortress sat with its back to the slopes of the vast eastern mountain ranges, well protected by high walls and steep slopes, but that did not slow the attacking forces. Cloud Warriors and Skymages swooped directly up to the parapet, and Rock Griffons carried other warriors up to support the assault. Although the centaurs of the Elemental Freeholds were stymied by the thick stone walls, the Darkling Symbiotes extended tendrils of vine from their heavy arms and hauled themselves directly up the face of the fortress.

The Dark Crusaders were not caught unawares by the approach of their attackers, but they were surprised by the ferocity of the assault. Bowmen and mages sought to pick off the elves and griffons, and brought many down, but they could not stop the attack. Once the Skymages and Cloud Warriors had secured a section of the wall, the elementals brought up tall ladders, and Keldane Falconer and Geddion Longblade led the remainder of their forces into Stonekeep.

The first target for the former Hero was the gatehouse, and he led an elite force of Symbiotes and Cloud Warriors directly there, aiming to open the gates and allow his

centaur allies into the battle. Keldane Falconer, High Priestess Kess, and Miraxes headed straight for the keep, fighting their way through the hordes of zombies and skeletons filling the fortress's courtyard.

A quartet of Skull Golems guarding the gatehouse slammed directly into the Symbiotes accompanying Longblade, felling one of the half-elven creatures in the fury of their charge, but it was not enough to stop the assault. Geddion shattered one of the Golems himself, while the remaining Symbiotes left two more in pieces, and six Cloud Warriors circled about the last, hacking away at the construct's limbs until it fell, leaving no Dark Crusaders between them and the gatehouse. It would not be long until Councillor Laurell and the other centaurs with him joined the fray.

Fall 435 Day 18

The furious assault on the Crusader-held fortress of Stonekeep continued as the Darkling Symbiotes held the area around the main gatehouse and Geddion Longblade led his force of Cloud Warriors inside. Soon the thick ironwood doors of Stonekeep creaked open, and a flood of centaurs rushed in, sweeping through the courtyard with the momentum of their advance. Now it was only a matter of time before Stonekeep fell.

The Dark Crusaders manning the fortress fought long and hard, but they were overmatched by the sheer force of the forces of the Elven Lords and the Wylden Host. A few dozen escaped from postern gates and hidden tunnels leading deep into the mountains, but most of the garrison was destroyed, cut down and burned in a huge pyre just outside the walls. The necromancer in command of the fortress was thrown into the flames alive, his screams clearing the befouled air above Stonekeep. As night fell and the last of the Dark Crusaders were destroyed or driven into the hills, the leaders of the Elemental and Elven forces met in the courtyard. All five of the commanders looked worn and bloodied, but none was in true danger of succumbing to their wounds.

Longblade was the first to speak, addressing the Elementals, "Now that we have secured our flanks, we must move down into the lowlands. The cult of the Apocalypse and the Darkmarch Shyft must be stopped, and soon."

Councillor Laurell shook her head, her sweat-streaked flanks gleaming in the rising moon, "My path does not lie towards the lowlands, Master Longblade. I and mine will travel north, to strike again at the forces of the Dark Crusade."

Geddion Longblade looked shocked, and stepped forward, anger writ plain on his strong features, but Miraxus put out a hand, his voice hissing and slithering between his teeth, "Councillor... you must know that the Apocalypse represents the greatest danger to the Land."

The elegant centaur shook her head once more, tossing her long, dark hair, "No, Draconum. The Land cries out for revenge against her despoilers. The misguided fools in the Necropolis must pay for their crimes against the Land."

The argument continued for some time, and tempers flared between the former Hero and the Councillor, until finally Keldane Falconer broke in, speaking for the first time this eve, "I understand your wish for revenge, Councillor, and I respect your fervor. If We leave a garrison here to hold this fortress open for those forces which

follow you north, will you divert part of your force to the lowlands with us? Even a score more fighters could turn the tide of the battle we mean to find."

The centaur was silent for a long moment, and was about to answer when Kess, who had been watching Keldane since he spoke up, stepped forward and placed a hand on Laurell's flank, smiling up at her for just a minute before looking away once again. Apparently, something passed between the two, however, for Laurell sighed heavily, "We will do that, Falconer. High Priestess Kess and a small portion of our forces will join you as you pass into the lowlands, but the majority still goes north."

Geddion Longblade once again looked like he wished to protest, but Keldane Falconer set a hand on his arm, nodding to the Elemental leader, "That will be enough, Councillor. I thank you."

Longblade grimaced, but nodded his grudging agreement, then raised his voice, speaking to the gathered fighters in the yard before the keep, "Get your rest now... we leave to fight the Darkness at dawn!"

Fall 435 Day 19

I watched as the force led by Miraxus, Geddion Longblade, Keldane Falconer, and High Priestess Kess left Stonekeep under a strong garrison of Elven Lords. Councillor Laurel led her centaurs and symbiotes north into the Rivvenheims, gathering up a few small tribes of snow centaurs as they went, but it was the larger force that I watched.

They had swept South Pass clean on their way to Stonekeep, destroying the column of zombies and necromancers that left the Crusader camp just before it was assaulted and cleaning up several additional patrols, but they still had to fight a few skirmishes with the remnants of the forces they had shattered, as well as additional patrols no doubt looking for those Crusaders they had already killed.

As the host made their way out of South Pass and into the Wylden, I pulled away from the Scrying Eye, returning to the Tower of Rokos and the Scrying Chamber. As my sight re-focused on the room before me, I found myself looking at a flat and brutal face, devoid of any emotion. Shocked by the sudden appearance of such a visage, I took a step back, and reached for the blade I no longer carried, but the man before me made no move.

It was not until the intruder spoke, his voice deep and rich with power and command, that I took in his purple and gold attire and recognized him as Seeker Azruk, "Oracle Kastali. 'Ve been asked t'give y'this." The words were filled with the growling tones of Down-Town Atlantis, but it was the slim roll of paper he held out that caught my attention. I took it from him, nodding my thanks, and he turned to leave without another word. By the time I had unrolled the paper into a neat strip, covered with fine, spidery script. I did not recognize the hand, but the message made the source clear enough: To Watch A Traitor Die, Tomorrow Night, Find Me If You Can.

Fall 435 Day 20

I slept until the sun was well over the horizon, knowing that I would not be returning to my bed until late tonight. I spent most of the day wandering the Tower grounds, watching Oathsworn spar in the courtyards, and pacing the aisles of the library. When I finally entered the Scrying Chamber, the light was starting to fade, and a chill had come into the air, causing me to draw my cloak about me.

When I connected to the Solonavi who would serve as my Scrying Eye, I immediately attempted to direct it towards Seeker Mock, but my view did not move, merely drifting in place within the Scrying Chamber. Frowning to myself, I turned my thoughts to the Oathbreaker Contri, and immediately my vision blurred across the Land. I did not go as far as I expected, however, as the Scrying Eye darted southwards, settling into the depths of the hilly forestland south of Atlantis. Hidden under the broad, thick canopy was sizeable camp. Men and women dressed in gray bustled here and there, while bowmen, mages, and warriors in leather and steel armor stood guard all about. Symbols of the Apocalypse Cult hung from the trees above, were daubed on the tents and lean-tos in blood, and were carved into the sod itself. My forehead burned under my mask, where I had been branded, but I guided my spiritual eyes forward, into the camp.

I moved cautiously, wary of any sorcerers with the ability to see me, but I made it to the large, central tent without incident. There I found what appeared to be a council of war gathered. I recognized the Galeshi Khoura, Rurik-that-was-Blessed, and Kem Ravenbane amongst the dozen or so cultists present. I searched about, and was about to give up, when Contri Oathbreaker strode in the door of the tent, the dead Solonavi weapon he carried seeming to suck up what little light there was within the heavy cloth walls.

Ravenbane snarled, his black face competing with Contri's lightning bolt for an absence of light. "You're late, Oathbreaker."

The former Oathsworn shrugged mildly, opening his mouth to speak, but no sound came out. Arching his back, Contri threw his hood off with a violent shake of his head, the stolen weapon he carried clattering to the ground as light blossomed from his chest, resolving itself into a slim glowing blade thrust through his stomach from the back.

The light from the blade threw harsh shadows across the stunned faces of the cultists present, reflecting from Rurik's once-gleaming armor and Khoura's wide round eyes. Kem was the first to cast aside his shock, snatching up his sword and charging across the room towards where Contri Oathbreaker was even now collapsing to his knees. The black-armored elf knocked the dying traitor aside, sweeping his silver blade in a wide arc through the area behind the body, but he caught only air.

I smiled to myself, quickly darting away from the tent to search out Mock and to see the results of his handiwork. Although the slim Seeker eluded my sight, he also left the cultists grasping at air, leaving behind a high, mocking laugh ringing from the trees as the camp dissolved into turmoil.

Fall 435 Day 21

The chaos in the Apocalypse camp was complete. Even after a short night's sleep, the Scrying Pool was alight with men and woman running this way and that, and the

number of unhappy people with weapons in the camp seemed to have doubled. I wasn't sure why the cultists had chosen this location for such a large camp, if they wanted to strike at Atlantis, they would certainly not have made camp beyond the city, and they were across a broad expanse of water from Xandressa. I supposed that they might be preparing for a strike on the isle of Delphane, but they were some distance from that end of the point, and would require significant movement down the peninsula to reach a place opposite the island.

Knowing that Lord Vextha would wish to know what the Apocalypse cultists were doing, I settled my Scrying Sight back into the pavilion where Mock had slain the traitor Contri. Khoura, Rurik, and Kem were once again within the tent, but they had been joined by the Xandressan Dagon and none other than Preceptor Nala. Gasping softly to myself, I ducked away from the tent, but she took no notice of me, and I slowly directed the Solonavi providing my Scrying Sight back into the meeting-place.

Rurik's lilting elven tones had been tainted by a harsh rasp, but the accent of the Rivvenheims was still printed strongly on his words, "All is in readiness, Preceptor. Our forces are assembled, and we only await your command."

"And what of the Venthian Contri and his killer? What progress there?" Nala's words were harder, colder, than those of the former elven priest, and even without the hissing of the twisted beast curled about her feet it was clear that she was unhappy. Khoura's words were hushed by the fine gold mesh hanging from her headdress, but they were still audible, "Contri's body has been disposed of, but the killer, he escaped." I felt like laughing at Mock's escape, and my mirth doubled at the affect the news had upon the head of the Apocalypse cult.

Nala surged forward, grasping the Galeshi about the neck with one slim hand and lifting her from the ground with a strength belying her thin frame. Kicking wildly, the veiled cultist struggled for air, shaking her head wildly as the Preceptor asked, "And what affect will that have on our operation?"

It was Kem Ravenbane who answered, his colorless lips writhing around the words, "None, Preceptor. Our plans are unimpeded by the death of one commander." The emphasis on the last two words of the elf's statement drew Nala up, and she released Khoura, allowing the woman to collapse to her knees, gasping for breath.

The Preceptor turned to leave, with Dagon, still silent, moving to follow her. At the door, she turned about, addressing the cultists gathered within the pavilion. "Do not fail me. This is too important for a bout of incompetence to get in the way."

Fall 435 Day 22

When I entered the Scrying Chamber this morning, a page with two wrapped scrolls awaited me. The first was a thin strip of paper, and this time I immediately recognized the handwriting, "I Hope You Enjoyed The Show. I Will Return Soon." I could not decide if I was glad or upset at this news, for although the Mock was skilled, his attitude left something to be desired.

The second piece of paper was written in a precise hand, and signed by Daheia, "Lord Anquilis requests that you look in on Raydan Marz once again. We have reason to believe he is planning a major operation."

Although unsure what the renegade Atlantean could be doing that was more important than investigating the plans of Preceptor Nala, I obeyed the archivist's wish, directing my Scrying Sight northwest, into the valley that hid his sky-castle.

What I saw there was astonishing. The valley was filled with tents and other shelters, the encampment of a sizeable army. In addition to Raydan Marz's personal troops, I spotted a small group of Amazons, a half-dozen lean-tos filled with dwarves, a force of soldiers from Khamsin, a score or more Galeshi, Anunub's Golemcore warriors, a small crew of Xandressans, some Scalesworn and a few Draconum, Caeronns and Venetians, and motley assortment of Prieskans fresh from the defense of their homeland.

My amazement grew as I scanned the camp more closely, as although there were very definite gaps between each of the small encampments, I could see no actual clashes between the broad range of warriors represented within Marz's valley. Whatever has drawn them here is apparently important enough that they have put aside, for the most part, the differences that have so long split the Land with strife.

I studied the camp for most of the day, and the sun was beginning to set when a series of Dragonfly riders began to buzz in from the east. I directed the Scrying Eye in that direction, and came upon a quick-moving column of elves and centaurs. They were dirty, and as haggard as I have ever seen Elven Lords, but they kept up their ground-eating pace, heading directly towards the Prieskan valley that sheltered Marz's sky-castle. At their head, I recognized none other than Geddion Longblade, Keldane Falconer, High Priestess Kess, and Miraxus. They had fast-marched their force across the breadth of the Land more quickly than I had ever seen it done before.

As the elves and centaurs crested the last hill before the valley, a small group exited the sky-castle, moving out to meet them. The group met with the newcomers, directed them towards a section of ground yet unclaimed, and brought their leaders into the sky-castle. Of those champions already gathered, I recognized Raydan Marz and Magus Anunub immediately, and they were flanked by a Xandressan captain and a Khamsin pistoleer I did not recognize, as well as a bronze-armored dwarf with a hammer taller than himself. The two who surprised me by their presence, however, were Desmanda, walking behind Raydan Marz as if she could see perfectly through her deep crimson magestone eyes, and an Amazon I immediately recognized as Tonen Swiftblade.

Fall 435 Day 23

I watched the planning and preparations of the warlords gathered by Raydan Marz with great interest, and the plan that they laid out was ambitious to the extreme. A group of men and golems commanded by Anunub and formed around his Golemcore strike force left the valley almost immediately after the arrival of the elves and centaurs from the east. This small army was dressed in Atlantean uniforms, particularly those stolen from the Imperial Legion. Although they did not quite have the shine and luster of true Legionnaires, they looked quite authentic at first glance. A large portion of the remaining soldiers left soon after, led by the Dwarf and Geddion Longblade, marching with a great deal more stealth eastwards around Luxor and Rokos, then back southward, towards Atlantis. Although I intended to keep an eye on the force traveling past Luxor and Rokos, Anquilis requested that I

continue to watch Marz himself, as he was sure to be at the forefront of any fighting to be done.

Not long after the majority of the force he had gathered left the valley, Raydan Marz brought the remainder within his sky-castle, and the citadel flew eastward, following a ley-line that arched northeast towards Venetia, then followed the Roa Vizorr south once more. This advance was not a quiet one, and soon garnered a great deal of attention from the Atlanteans guarding the banks of the river. The sky-castle, however, flew above the range of any artillery the Atlanteans could bring to bear, not deigning to come down and fight, but continuing its stately progress towards the capital of the Empire. Dragonfly patrols were sent up to attack the rogue warlord's fortress, but Marz's own dragonfly riders and elves mounted on griffons met them, engaging in hard-fought dogfights over the broad river and managing to hold off the attackers.

As Marz's citadel approached Atlantis itself, I was shocked to see the huge force arrayed to meet them. Imperial Legionnaires, Delphana mages, members of the Golemcore, and basic Atlantean soldiers were arrayed in seemingly unending ranks. And yet, when the sky-castle approached the city-in-the-sky, it began to drop closer to the ground. As it sank lower, the Atlantean forces awaiting it began to fire. Blasts of magical energy, explosive bolts, and arcs of lightning lanced out towards the approaching fortress, many missing, but an increasing number striking home, shattering turrets and blasting apart walls. I drew the Scrying Eye closer to the sky-fortress, expecting to see Marz's force being savaged on the battlements, but they were not there. The walls and walks of the sky-castle were devoid of life, entirely unmanned.

As the structure of the sky-castle began to falter, and chunks of masonry rained down on the Atlantean defenders, a large force of sky-mages, dragonfly riders, griffons, and other aerial combatants left from a postern gate on the north side of the fortress, protected from the Atlantean fire by the still-sinking sky-castle. Closing with group, I spotted Raydan Marz, Desmanda, Tonen, Kess, Keldane, Miraxus, and other commanders among them, abandoning the sky-fortress to its fate.

I could not think what would be worth sacrificing Marz's sky-castle for, until a series of huge explosions rocked Atlantis-on-High, and the city itself seemed to shudder. Directing my Solonavi guide there, I saw Anunub standing on the edge of a widening precipice, as a huge section of Atlantis itself separated from the rest. Anunub's men, along with Xandressans and Rebel troops in Atlantean uniforms guarded the edges of this giant floating rock, keeping back any true Imperial Legionnaires who tried to jump the expanding gap.

As the last few functioning lifts dropped down, ferrying more of Marz's warriors up to the commandeered section of Atlantis and Marz himself and his flying compatriots circled around to join Anunub, I saw the method to the renegade warlord's madness. He had, in effect, traded up for a larger version of his sky-fortress, one which could carry all of his warriors. Where he would take this formidable force remained to be seen, but with the powerful Magestone blocks beneath their stolen section of Atlantis for power, there were few places in the Land he could not reach.