

# From the Journal of Renauld the Bard

## The 14th Day of Stormdance, 1506

As I set my quill to this page an unrolled scroll rests in front of me, and I know a copy of this text has come into the possession of many of my brothers and sisters in song. We have been tasked as criers to spread the word along the merchant road that the great Merchant Houses seek heroes to enter the ruins of Shadowfane. It stirs my heart to hear a call to heroes to return to that place.

Has it been more than ten years since the War of the Heart? Has it been more than ten years since those halls became empty, with only the echos of memories and ghosts to remind us of the heroes that once gathered there? I write these words to those heroes who would go to that place and champion the cause of the Merchant Houses and of Shadowfane itself so you know what has come before you.

Who does not remember the Night of Rending, when the War of the Heart came to its culmination? After the War of the Maw had been won, and the Plague of Avanlei had been turned aside, how could that darkness come? After the King of Rhoemurg had been championed, and the Naporean heir revealed, how could we again face war? Yet in the face of these many victories the knights and champions of the land stood in front of dark gates where the host of the Obsidian Heart gathered and prepared for their final battle.

Yet on that night no dark general called forth the host from the gate. No voice set them to task. As the seething horde waited, clawing at gates in Trechele and Selarno and Avanlei and Rhoemurg, as the lords of Mhurkiel prepared the slave companies for war, and the Eluviar gathered light to themselves to fight this battle, and the Winter Tribes called their greatest ancestors for wisdom and strength, so did the heroes of Shadowfane bring war to the Obsidian Heart. In the end the darkness passed, and dawn came, and the Obsidian gates faded.

So did the cry of victory and the call for the glory of those who fought at the gate ring from every tower in the lands. Yet it was the sorrow of noble folk and commoner alike that no victory call echoed back. Shadowfane was empty, a terrible price to pay for the victory that had been won.

I still remember that night, weeks and weeks after the heroes of Shadowfane had disappeared. As I walked Shadowfane, that empty place, haunted by memories of the times it had been filled with heroes armed with steel and spell, I realized for the first time that they would not return.

## The Year 1507

Following the lead of the heroes of Shadowfane, the High Patriarch of the Church in Trechele convened the Council of Accord in 1507 to discuss and ratify a lasting peace with those who call themselves of the Pale. While certain radical elements on both sides still agitated for war, the Arch Druids of Locksmoor themselves made an appearance on the border of Trechele, and, after several weeks of negotiation and, some say, celebration, the Declaration of Remembrances was signed, brining a last peace between the Church and the Druids of Locksmoor. For their part, the Court of the Patriarch is now advised on even the most delicate of matters by an aged Druid, and it is said that, at each Temple, a representative from the Pale sits at the side of the High Priests.

Detractors among the Inquisition and the Gray Rangers skirmish and remain unsatisfied. Factions within the Inquisition have rebelled under the leadership of Inquisitor Embrik and have been outlawed. This rogue group known as the Protectorate now stalks the wild, eliminating Pale followers and disrupting the budding peace.

Locksmoor opens up its borders, becoming the sixth kingdom.

Vespera gains support among those nobles of Trechele that were saved by those priests during the War of the Maw, and from Selarno families seeking aid in the increasingly violent political war taking place to fill the void of the loss of House Selarno. Political and spiritual discussion on the place of Vespera becomes popular in the noble courts of the south.

Cults following the Nylachia rise up in many places, keeping the Inquisition busy outside of Trechele. Undead creatures are found to be more fearsome, but fewer roam un-tethered in the land.

The divine bloodline of Naporea returns to lands once held by Selarno families and gains immediate support among many of the nobles. The arrival of King Joval Naporea helps to quell inter-house wars and restores some measure of peace to the streets of the cities.

The first anniversary of the War of the Heart is observed as a holiday. The Festival of the Gate is celebrated on Highsummer. The church of Myrkorim speaks of divine inspiration and the Six Blades are forged, each by a different smith. Each Kingdom is given one blade.

Shadowfane stands empty, and few travel north from the Crossroads to travel to that dangerous place, despite the increased traffic on the merchant road of people moving to and from Locksmoor. News of strange folk seen in Shadowfane and at the Crossroads persist.

The borders of the Highlands, closed and forbidden to outsiders for many years, were opened. From those travelers who ventured there came wild tales of Trolls from the mountains, ancient stone villages, and long forgotten peoples now once again beginning to traverse the lands. The ladies of the Vaurelis Winter Tribe warn of the dangers of the Northlands, but are largely ignored in favor of the potential wealth and mystery that land provides.

While the Great Grove of Locksmoor was always the religious center of the Highlands, the Clans now stepped forward to take political control, negotiating with the Merchant Houses and appointing a small outpost of Priests to sit in on their conclaves, educating them to various worldly matters and offering advice when asked. For much had changed in the Kingdoms."

## The Year 1508

Reports of undead within the Halls of the Eurvein begin to surface. The Eurvein meet in council and begin to rally for war.

King Bloodhaunt of the Malekyrg recognizes the Kh'rewyn as both a sovereign nation and a distinct race of elf. The Kingdom of Eluviar also recognizes the young kingdom. War breaks out in Malekyrg as several houses attempt a coup of the royal house seeing the nod as a sign of weakness. Lord Bonesong, formally Lord Ghoulsong and a loyal supporter of House Bloodhaunt, leads a full third of the Malekyrg against the royal house claiming the the First King has ascended. Malekyrg is divided, with many calling to the Nylachia as their religion.

Standing at the place of an ancient Druid Grove, the Kher'wyn Elves grow in both strength and purpose. Led by a Council of Regents containing those who once were members of the three races of Elves (Liendrel, Malekyrg, and Eluviar), the Kh'rewyn are said to be slowly untwisting the forest, and, on some long nights, a glimmering, ethereal web can be seen stretching over the land of Malekyr. Relationships are strong between the Kh'rewyn Regency and King Bloodhaunt of the Malekyrg and this alliance aided King Bloodhaunt in thwarting the efforts of Lord Bonesong thus far.

Word comes from the Groves of the Pale that powerful wraiths hunt the Pale Hunters and desecrate many of their sacred groves. The Gray Rangers spread the word that bowing to the demands of the White Court has caused this. Whispers of a Wraith King who controls a court of lords and many lesser wraiths spreads along the merchant road.

## The Year 1509

In the lands of Avanlei the rightful King had returned to the throne. His rule, however, was to be brief. His health deteriorating, he abdicates to the countryside to live out the last of his days. In a shocking turn his oldest son declares his love for one of the common folk and, supported by the church of Vespera, steps aside from the throne rather than give up his love. His younger sister rises to take the throne of Avanlei. Energetic and strong willed, the young Queen of Avanlei was quick to become tangentially embroiled in the Malekyrg uprising, although to what extent no one knows. It is said that much of the Knighthood of the Kingdom had spent their blood in the Twisted Wood, and a new generation of young Lords now struggles with the always great burden of leadership.

Although Mhurkiel remains largely unchanged under their ever watchful Queen, she stays true to her word and allows the Free Commons of the Belik Hills to retain its independence. Rumor has it that the Slave Lords are none too pleased. That place has afforded much opportunity for burgeoning overland trade and commerce. Some whisper that the freehold, free from the rule of Mhurkiel or Selarno, has also become a stepping stone to insurgents trying to free slaves from Mhurkiel, and a hotbed of Selarno intrigue.

With the departure of the thrice cursed House of Wickford from the mages Guild, the Noble House of Xerberes has emerged from the shadows of Mhurkiel to exert influence on the Guild Council.

Greatly detached from much of the trails of the previous years, it appears that Mhurkiel's star is indeed ascendant, and the notorious Handmaidens of the Queen have become her voice across the land.

Three tribes of Leindrel elves in the Whisperhaunt forest are utterly destroyed. Twisted spirits are seen wandering the edge of the wood. Merchants and a few scant survivors claim that the very cries of these spirits cause pain and death, and that the haunting music entrances those who hear it. The Morbhaine bring news to the court of Avanlei of a malevolent presence that draw the spirits to her in a spectral court; the Banshee Queen.

## The Year 1510

The Eurvein suffer greatly in the War of the Deep Halls. They speak of a Lich King who corrupts the very elementals that once guarded their halls. Many undead hunt their folk and some Eurvein serve this dark lord. These corrupted Eurvein have name for their Lich King... Wickford. The Eurvein are forced from their halls in a fighting retreat.

The High Patriarch of the White Court welcomes Vespera, Lady of Mystery back into the folds of the church. The shocking news spreads among the Kingdoms. Some hear the news with trepidation, but many see it as a great victory for the White Court and proof of the increasing power and influence of their gods. Many see this as the sign that the

stalemate between the White Court and the Black Court will be broken. The High Patriarch of Elshea stands as the only dissenting vote. Some say it was the sudden disappearance of Patriarch and High Inquisitor Fire-eye in 1506 that allowed such a radical change.

With the Lord of House Selarno missing and his successor dead by her own hand the Kingdom looks to House Naporea to honor its divine blood and take its rightful place on the throne. Joval, now King Joval Naporea, takes the throne and proclaims that his lands shall be named the Kingdom of Naporea once again. Although the King has a surprising amount of overwhelming support among the nobles of the land, rumors speak of remnants of the Selarno family disappearing into the countryside, many sick with plague. Rumors abound of a terrible curse that befell that formerly royal family, and an unholy hatred that burns in the hearts of those that remain loyal to the missing bandit King.

Tensions increase between the Church of Elshea and the Church of Vespera, and they come to a head when the High Matriarch of Vespera claims the Writs of Elshea to be a perversion and circumvention of the natural progression of the Tapestry. She calls for them to be forbidden. War breaks out between the churches, and the High Patriarch calls for a cease of all hostilities. Although the Vesperan church complies, the Church of Elshea destroys several important churches and shrines devoted to Vespera and inflicts Writs on many of the important priests and priestess therein.

King Joval of Naporea faces his first of many struggles in the form of daily emissaries from the Vesperan Priesthood, eager to keep the desires of he who holds the true blood of Elshea in check.

In the lands of the Kh'rewyn Lady Regent Delfestra proclaims her allegiance to Sereness of the White Court and, at the same time, renounces her position on the Council of Regents in favor of a powerful priestess of Azerial. Lady Delfestra became a spiritual advisor to the Regency and formal ambassador to Malekyrg.

## The Year 1511

With the Elshean War in full swing, the High Patriarch is forced to issue an ultimatum; cease the war and come before the Court. In a confrontation in the High Court the High Patriarch of Elshea demands that all talk of outlawing the divine gifts of Elshea end. The High Patriarch tells him that he will not be threatened into a particular decision and that the matter is not yet decided. The High Patriarch of Elshea leaves the High Court, renouncing the church.

With more and more strange folk seen in the Shadowfane area, Kordovan merchants travel to the area as a chance for opportunity. They find that a small group of travelers

have come through the Crimson Gate itself and that they deal and share information with the Crimson Shroud. The Crimson Shroud prepares to test the Crimson Gate to determine if there is a threat to the land. The Archmage Deepsong leads the Crimson Shroud into the Crimson Gate and the mystics disappear. Weeks pass and they do not return.

The strange folk that have come through the Crimson Gate are named the Wayward. Locked from their place of origin with only vague memories of their former life, many of the Wayward grow frustrated with waiting for the return of the Crimson Shroud and the attempts to allow them to return and begin to forge a new life. Some Merchant Houses provide goods and trade with them.

Reports of worshippers of the Black Court begin to surface. The Black Church of Azeriel calls for its worshippers to hunt down and destroy all of the Nylachia even as the Insatiable, also called the Ghoul Lord, leaves that fold and rises to power in the Murthean Church. The High Church of Azeriel denounces Malediction as a tool of the enemy and forms three orders to destroy the servants of the Nylachia and their works. The Order of Abolition takes the mantle of Absolution. The Order of Incineration takes the mantle of Purification. The Order of Forbearance takes the mantle of Forbiddance. These orders seek information on the old Draconic orders to aid them in hunting the Nylachia. This gives rise to the Black Templars, knights that channel divine magic through their weapons.

The Kh'rewyn elves are assaulted by minions of the Shetra, a cult of spider worshippers who claim to follow Lord Spider. The cult finds its way into the Kh'rewyn lands with remarkable ease, despite the Malekyrg war raging around it. The Kh'rewyn first use the Cinereal Thorn and enchant the vine to create a wall of thorns to surround their court. Relationships between the Kh'rewyn Regency and the Malekyrg Monarchy begin to decline when Kh'rewyn Ambassador Delphestra disappears into the Twisted Wood.

## The Year 1512

Chaos among the White Court worshippers continues. The War between Elshea and Vespera begins anew, and the Elshean Church forswears all contact with the church. The High Patriarch excommunicates the worshippers of Elshea and proclaims the worship of the Huntress forbidden. Many of the church sympathize with Elshea and blood runs in the temples. The Kingdom of Naporea and the divine blood of Elshea objects and offers refuge to her followers. The King takes the place of arbitrator but the standoff is clear; The Church of Elshea will not give up its divine gifts and the Patriarch will neither back away in the face of blackmail nor support the use of the Writs against members of the White Court, or the persecution of another religion.

The Inquisition meets the Black Templars at the southern border of Avanlei and engages

the host in sight of the Whisperhaunt. The Inquisition is unprepared for the Templar battle line and is routed. The High Church prays for guidance, and White Templars begin to practice their devout art.

Amidst the recovery of the War of the Maw and a divided church, King Mercenes struggles to meditate for all the factions. Kordova takes this opportunity, and, some say, a cue from the successful coup in Selarno, to agitate for independence. At first, such cries were easily ignored. However, as things become more serious and many radical followers of the Inquisition and, later, Elshea, break ranks and move to Kordova, the situation comes to a boiling point. Wishing to act quickly but fairly, King Mercenes dispatches a strong force of his most loyal guards to Frogarre and then southward to Kordova to arrest the most vociferous of the insurrectionists. The move meets with abject failure, as six War Golems of heretofore unknown origin encounter and massacre the band, leaving scant survivors and a renewed sense of pride among the Kordovan populace that, perhaps, their independence could be won.

News comes to the Locksmoor Grove that some of the Pale Hunters have been tainted. Although the greatest of the Hunters remain pure, the lessers are in danger. The magics of the Gray Man shift, and the Gray Rangers can call the Pale Hunters no more. The Gray Rangers act to strengthen the hunters against the growing threat.

Reports from the ruins of Shadowfane come south that the merchants have begun to gather a magical substance known as Orichalcum, a bright blue stone that is said to be the essence of arcane magic. The Merchant Guilds receive high interest for the stones from the Mage Guilds and the runesmiths of the Eurvein. The Eurvein use it to call forth elemental energies and empower themselves. The first embraced Eurvein appear, folk who have fully ascended to one of the elemental paths. Merchants move northward to find this substance and many Houses maintain a presence in Shadowfane to stake their claim in the Orichalcum trade.

## The Year 1513

The Merchant House competition over Orichalcum turns to manipulation and shadow wars. The established Merchant Houses of Shadowfane unite and form an alliance to end the violence and, some say, to prevent new houses from entering the trade. The Alliance takes to updating the laws of the Crimson Shroud, supporting the charter for the Shroud who are still missing. Some claim that this move prevents the Kingdoms from calling the charter void with the disappearance of the Shroud. The Wayward demand a say in the discussions and are granted that right. Meanwhile mercenaries move to Shadowfane to take advantage of lucrative contracts protecting the trade. Banditry at the Crossroads grows.

Reports of hives of giant insects appear in northern Trechele, Mhurkiel, and Avanlei. These hives of spirits begin to attract followers; shamans who call on the power of these insect spirits. The Locksmoor Grove immediately forbids and outlaws this practice and urges the White Court to do the same. Eljers Xerebres calls on the power of the insect spirits and goes mad, murdering all his servants and slaves and disappearing into the mountains to the south.

The Church of Vespera continues to gather knowledge for the High Church and demands access to the libraries of the three great Mages Guilds. The noble guilds mitigate the investigation by calling on an old custom and law called Noble Right, compromising by accepting an advisor from the Vesperan Church on their council. The Seven Veils Guild, having no such recourse, disbands and disappears entirely.

## The Year 1514

The Kordova Rebellion gains momentum. Several battles are fought, and although outnumbered those battles where the War Golems can be brought to bear cause a rout of Trechele forces. The Trechele knights are forced to adopt a hit and run strategy to engage and break off before the War Golems can move to the battlefield.

The War heats up between the White Court and the Black Court. The three black Orders meet the Inquisition several times but White Templars have become more common. There is a series of battles over temples and shrines where sacred places to both the Black and the White are destroyed. Efforts of the Black Court are hampered by an internal war when Murthean and Xereelos priests decide they aren't quite ready to give up the dark gifts of Malediction bestowed by their divine favor.

The Free Commons of the Belik Hills has been growing. Many former slaves settle there rather than risk an unknown life outside the support of that freehold. The hold grows into a town and the roads are heavy with traffic. Mysterious bandit activity becomes problematic since the freehold is outside the iron grip of the slave lords and several outlying buildings and new villages are destroyed.

With the increased traffic into Locksmoor the troll-folk are seen more frequently. Many come down from the hills. Raids increase and trolls begin to travel more frequently throughout the lands. Troll shamans travel to meet with the Council of Storytellers among the Winter Tribes. The most powerful of the trolls, the reclusive Iron Trolls, remain largely in the mountains. After many complaints the Highland Lords are moved to send envoys into the mountains to find a way to deal with the raiding trolls.

## The Year 1515

Magical research continues. Mages all over the six kingdoms begin to learn how to drain Orichalcum and directly channel it into arcane energy. The Amber Spires Guild announces that they have found a way greatly enhance enchantment using Orichalcum. The value of the substance spikes, causing the Eurvein to falter in their war against the Lich King Wickford as they had come to depend upon it.

Meanwhile the Vesperan church brings news to their ally, King Mercenes. The War Golems of Kordova also require Orichalcum to function. Trechele declares it illegal to transport or trade Orichalcum within its borders and blockades Kordova to stop the substance from entering that land. Kordova comes to rely on smugglers to break the blockade and bring them Orichalcum. Both sides hire mages to open or destroy gates in an effort to control the Orichalcum flow. Black Market prices jump.

The Blood Tribes attack Rhoemurg with renewed vigor, and a new tribe has risen among them. This tribe, the Tribe of the Black Vein, kills in the name of the dark god Nylachim and the Nylachia host.

## The Year 1516

Travel and news from Shadowfane stops. Just before Highsummer, the Merchant Houses of Shadowfane stopped sending word to along the merchant road, and the flow of Orichalcum has dried up. Members of the Mages Guilds now seek more of the substance to continue their research, and the Kordova Rebellion has begun to falter. All attempts to investigate have met with failure.

At the request of the Merchant Houses of Shadowfane there has been a gathering of heroes, mercenaries, and adventurers. The mission is clear; find out what happened in Shadowfane!