

VOLUME 06

DIRTY HAVOC!

THE CHRONICLES OF THE WORLD OF RACKHAM



NEWS

November – January new releases
2006 preview: The Orcs of the Behemoth

RACKHAM WORKSHOP

Under the Light: Tips for painting a Cynwall army
Painting guide: Cynwall selsým

STRATEGY

Battle report: The Gorge of the Dragon
Where the Army of the Insane clashes with the Servants of the Eclyrion

UNIVERSE

Portrait: Captain Krill
Lanever: The Lair of the Dragon, from the exile to the second battle of Kaiber

GAMING AIDS

Hybrid RPG rules & campaign
Introduction to *Confrontation 3*: five exclusive scenarios
...

11 EXCLUSIVE CARDS



“

“Well before men began digging in the ground of Cadwallon, the tall Cynwäll tower was dominating the sea. And, long before this edifice was raised, the legends say that other peoples had lived there... and have disappeared since.

The Cadwës know little about these legends. Only the most erudite and most talkative elves speak of the Ancients whose territory was once lying here. They were a powerful yet bloodthirsty brood allied with the most evil dragons of Creation. The Cynwälls have always refused to comment on these things and especially on the alliance with the venerated reptiles, so nothing confirms the claims made by those who have expressed themselves on this question.”

Cadwallon

”



Sitting cross-legged in the shade of a cherry tree in bloom, surrounded by shards of porcelain taken from countless broken cups, bazûka was trying as hard as he could to perform the complex gestures of the tea ceremony. He hated this ritual, yet the shogun had insisted. According to him, a warrior who doesn't master the tea ceremony isn't worth more than a rat. The alarm yung's characteristic song saved bazûka from a nervous breakdown. Finally, some action! The tyrant of zaikhai jumped up and readjusted his kimono. A sweaty ashiqarû came rushing into the garden.

"bazûka-san, some bearded ones with steam have appeared from a tunnel near the temple of the four winds!"

"Isn't that bad for the tea..."



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CAUTION!

Some articles in this issue mention accessories that must be handled extremely
carefully: the modelling knife with which one can cut oneself, the cyanoacryla-
te glue that bonds very quickly... We recommend that the youngest players and
collectors only do the following activities under adult supervision and always
carefully read and follow the instructions supplied with this material.

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CRY HAVOC !

EDITORIAL 03

NEWS 04

PREVIEW 13

WORKSHOP

The Colours of War: Under the Light 16

Painting Guide: Cynwäll Selsým 22

STRATEGY

Battle Report: The Gorge of the Dragon

Where the Army of the Insane clashes with the Servants of the Echyron 24

UNIVERSE

Portrait: Captain Krill 46

The Lair of the Dragons 48

Exile 50

Noesis 56

The Republic of Lanever 62

Diplomacies 68

The Heritage of the Ancients 74

GALLERY

Preparatory sketches for the illustrations of Cadwallon's geography 79

GAMING AIDS BOOKLET

The Gaming Aids booklet cannot be sold separately from Cry Havoc !.

Hybrid Campaign: Sacrilege 02

Hybrid Campaign: Sacrilege I & III : Breakthrough! 04

Hybrid Campaign: Sacrilege II or IV : The Traitor 06

Hybrid Campaign: Sacrilege II or IV : The Experiment 08

Hybrid RPG Rules: The Right Stuff 10

Hybrid RPG Campaign: Bloody Encounters 15

Hybrid RPG Campaign: Fiery Pacification 18

Hybrid RPG Campaign: Fight For Freedom 21

Confrontation 3 Tutorial: A New Beginning 26

Sered (Hybrid)

Mehöl (Hybrid)

Wolfen hunter (Wolfen of Yllia)

Nelphaëll (Hybrid)

Cynwäll varsým (Hybrid)

Cynwäll akhamiäl (Hybrid)

Wound table (Confrontation 3)

Mana recovery table (Confrontation 3)

Griffin thallion (Hybrid)

Construct warrior (Hybrid)

Mehöl, guardian of the Sphinx (Cynwäll Elves)

These cards cannot be sold separately from Cry Havoc ! volume 6.

editorial



PRINCE ELHAN IS KNOWN BY ALL THE ELVES OF CREATION FOR HAVING GUIDED HIS FOLLOWERS TO LIGHT. THEIR EXILE WAS THE FOUNDING ACT OF THE CYNWALL NATION. FOR A LONG TIME REMAINING UNINVOLVED IN THE WARS FORGING DARKLASH'S DESTINY, THE ELVES OF LIGHT HAVE COME OUT OF THEIR ISOLATION TO STRIKE A DECISIVE BLOW TO THE LIMB OF ACHERON AND ITS ALLIES. THE SECOND BATTLE OF KAÏBER MARKED THE DRAGON PEOPLE'S ENTRY IN THE RAG'NAROK. THIS SIXTH VOLUME OF *Cry Havoc* PRESENTS THESE ELVES FAMOUS FOR THEIR CHOICE OF SOCIETY: A REPUBLIC TO UNITE THEM AND NEMESIS TO GUARD THEM FROM DARKNESS. YET THESE AREN'T THE ONLY KEYS TO THEIR NATION. THE CYNWALL ELVES ARE ALSO THE KEEPERS OF ANCESTRAL SECRETS THAT THEIR GUIDE MUST PROTECT.

THE *Gaming Aids* BOOKLET INCLUDES BRAND NEW SCENARIOS TO TEST THE NEW *Confrontation 3* RULES. FURTHERMORE, IT INTRODUCES THE CYNWALLS INTO THE LABORATORIES OF THE HYBRID PROJECT THANKS TO AN ORIGINAL CAMPAIGN FOR *Hybrid* AND *Nemesis*. A NEW GAMING MODE (AS WELL AS THREE MISSIONS DEVOTED TO IT) IS ALSO PROVIDED. IT IS BASED ON SIMPLE PRINCIPLES: ONE MINIATURE PER PLAYER TO BUILD A GROUP OF HEROES THAT CONFRONTS THE TRAPS OF A GAME MASTER! THIS ISN'T *Cadwallon* YET, BUT IT'S STILL THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIMENT WITH A NEW GAMING EXPERIENCE.

Enjoy.

AND DON'T FORGET: "GIVE NO QUARTER!"

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CONFRONTATION INITIATION SET



T

he sylvan animae are known for their ability to hide themselves in the leaves of the trees. To become predators of blood, the Wolfen of the Red Oaks must capture a sylvan anima. Alas, their forest is threatened: invaders from Syharhalna are on the prowl...

This Initiation Set includes everything needed for players to start playing Confrontation 3.

THIS BOX INCLUDES:

- 1 CONFRONTATION® 3 RULE BOOK
- 1 INITIATION BOOKLET
- 6 SIX-SIDED DICE
- CARDS AND COUNTERS
- 1 EXCLUSIVE BOOKLET CONTAINING SCENARIOS ADAPTED TO THE FIGHTERS IN THIS INITIATION SET
- THE SENTINELS OF DANAKIL (BOX OF 5 MINIATURES)
- THE PREDATORS OF BLOOD (BOX OF 4 MINIATURES)





GOBLINS OF NO-DAN-KAR

BARON OZÖHN (SECOND INCARNATION)



F

or Baron Ozöhn the Rag'narok is not an apocalyptic event that has been predicted since the beginning of time. It is rather the opportunity for him to put his talents as a merciless hunter to test. This noble goblin's only pleasure in his gilded life is the thrill provided by the most deadly of frays

Two models of Baron Ozöhn are supplied: standing and mounted on a giant rat. Each of these can be equipped with different weapons: lance, sword or experimental rifle. Baron Ozöhn is compatible with the profile included in the *Second Incarnations 2* set of cards.

THIS BOX INCLUDES:

2 MINIATURES AND 3 CARDS:
BARON OZÖHN (ON GIANT RAT, REFERENCE CARD), BARON OZÖHN (STANDING, REFERENCE CARD), BARON OZÖHN (EXPLANATORY CARD)

BARON OZÖHN (ON GIANT RAT)
RANK: GOBLIN ELITE CHAMPION.
SECOND INCARNATION
105 A.P.

BARON OZÖHN (STANDING)
RANK: GOBLIN ELITE CHAMPION.
SECOND INCARNATION
70 A.P.



ORCS OF BRAN-Ô-KOR WAR-STAFF OF THE ORCS



T

hunder accompanies the clamour of the orcs gathering in the canyons of Bran-Ô-Kor. The time has come for their young nation to take up its weapons and to form a horde around its chiefs. The invaders will learn to respect and fear them, by force if necessary!

Accompanied by Veteran brutes, this Unit is ready to be played in Rag'Narok®. Its numbers can be complemented by a box of orc brutes."

THIS BOX INCLUDES:

BRUTE VETERAN (REFERENCE CARD), RANTAKH (REFERENCE CARD), BRUTE MUSICIAN (REFERENCE CARD), BRUTE STANDARD-BEARER (REFERENCE CARD), SKIN OF MIRAGES (ARTEFACT, 12 A.P.), FORCE OF THE CANYONS (TACTIC CARD).

BRUTE VETERAN
RANK: ORC VETERAN
21 A.P.

RANTAKH
RANK: ORC REGULAR CHAMPION
62 A.P.

BRUTE MUSICIAN
RANK: ORC REGULAR
21 A.P.

BRUTE STANDARD-BEARER
RANK: ORC REGULAR
21 A.P.

• DIRZ CROSSBOWMEN 2 •

SCTR 02



THIS BLISTER PACK INCLUDES:

3 MINIATURES AND
1 REFERENCE CARD:
DIRZ CROSSBOWMAN

RANK: SCORPION REGULAR.
13 A.P.

The troll broke away from the fray with a deafening noise and rushed towards the crossbowmen of the Scorpion like a savage beast. They were certainly victims that were easier to trample than the alchemical monsters... A salvo of bolts soon got stuck in his body. His thick hide easily absorbed the impact and he brushed off the projectiles with a flick of the wrist. Yet his wounds didn't close: the poison was already flowing in his veins and he would soon collapse.

The army of the Scorpion is renewed and reinforced by this second Dirz crossbowman. These new miniatures benefit from the most recent innovations made by Rackham in sculpting techniques. The reference profile is identical to the previous one, except that the "Mutagenic/-2" ability becomes "Mutagenic/-1" for a better adaptation to the rules of *Confrontation*® 3 and *Rag'Narok*®.

• HOOSÛ ÛZO, GOBLIN ZEALOT •

GBFI 02



THIS BLISTER PACK INCLUDES:

1 MINIATURE AND 5 CARDS:
HOOSÛ ÛZO (REFERENCE
CARD), THE COUNCIL OF RATS
(ARTEFACT, 14 A.P.), THE LUCKY
CHARM KIMONO (ARTEFACT,
12 A.P.), POWER OF THE SWARM
(COMMUNION, 25 A.P.), BRAZEN
CONSPIRACY (MIRACLE, 14 A.P.).

RANK: GOBLIN ZEALOT. ÛRAKEN.
50 A.P.

Ûzo, a true grey eminence in Shogun Ûraken's court, is a being of absolute treachery who easily equals the Barhans and the Syhars in the game of political intrigue. Yet his loyalty seems to be sincere. Under the sheen of the darkest of cynicisms, Ûzo is happy with the trust that the shogun has in him and would only betray him for reasons of utmost importance.

Like the other releases in these past few months for the goblins of No-Dan-Kar, Ûzo is bound to the Ûraken clan. Thanks to his modest strategic value (50 A.P.), he allows a Zealot's power to be included in most types of army composition, thus giving the goblins access to improved divination.

• AYANE •

OPCH 02



THIS BLISTER PACK INCLUDES:

1 MINIATURE AND
2 REFERENCE CARDS:
AYANE, OPHIDIAN SYHEE

RANK: OPHIDIAN REGULAR
CHAMPION, SLAVE.
59 A.P.



"In such a moment S'Erum liked to remember the details of this cruel and sensual game that bound him to Ayane. It could be that one day fate reunites them again, should he decide to return to Cadwallon. Six days earlier he had tasted with a smile the rumour brought back from Cadwallon by brothers of Arrogance. They had spoken of a free leaguer woman with a mutilated belly who was becoming a legend. They weren't able to say why, but they were sure that she bore a large serpent tattoo on her shoulder."

A character from the novel *The Ashes of Wrath*, Ayane is now available as a miniature. Endowed with the "Possessed," "Bravery," and "Toxic/O" abilities, she is perfect for the simulation of bloody skirmishes using the mysterious Ophidian Alliance. Ayane is supplied with a profile for the *Hybrid*® board game.

• DRUNE MINOTAUR •

DRCR 02



THIS BLISTER PACK INCLUDES:

1 MINIATURE AND
1 REFERENCE CARD:
DRUNE MINOTAUR

RANK: KELT CREATURE
62 A.P.



As the Age of Darkness befalls Aarklash, the minotaurs lend their services as mercenaries less and less, and choose to join their old friends the Kelts of the Sessairs clan. Yet unfortunately some of them have let themselves become overwhelmed by the horrors of war. These have chosen to join the terrifying Drunes with whom they share the taste for despair, for violence and for human flesh.

The Drune minotaur is a true battering ram (STR 11, RES 10) with phenomenal force of impact (Brutish charge, War fury, Fierce). He can be used just as well in *Confrontation*® as in *Rag'Narok*®, respectively as a support Creature and as a scourge for the enemy infantry.



SESSAIRS KELTS WAR-STAFF OF AVAGDDU



T

he mist is clearing on the plains of Avagddu to reveal a clan of intrepid warriors in arms. The totem of the goddess is being raised, carried by the sound of the war drums. Markhan the Wild will lead the Sessairs clan to victory!

Accompanied by Sessairs veterans, this Unit is ready for play in Rag'Narok®. Its numbers can furthermore be complemented by a box of warriors of Avagddu.

THIS BOX INCLUDES:

SESSAIRS VETERAN (REFERENCE CARD), MARKHAN THE WILD (REFERENCE CARD), SESSAIRS STANDARD-BEARER (REFERENCE CARD), SESSAIRS MUSICIAN (REFERENCE CARD), TORQUE OF AUDACITY (ARTEFACT, 12 A.P.), FIANN'S MALICE (TACTIC CARD).

SESSAIRS VETERAN
RANK: SESSAIRS VETERAN.
14 A.P.

MARKHAN THE WILD
RANK: SESSAIRS REGULAR CHAMPION.
50 A.P.

SESSAIRS STANDARD-BEARER
RANK: SESSAIRS REGULAR.
14 A.P.

SESSAIRS MUSICIAN
RANK: SESSAIRS REGULAR.
14 A.P.





DEVOURERS OF VILE-TIS

MARAUDERS OF VILE-TIS



R

ebels. Vagabonds. Murderers. The Devourers no longer content themselves with sowing chaos and destruction in the wake of their wanderings. They now gather around dangerous war chiefs and form armies in the name of the Beast

This box contains all you need to assemble a Unit of 5 different Devourers. Three different weapon combinations are available and three profiles can be created (one Regular and two Veterans). All accessories are also provided to turn one of them into a Leader. This Unit is ready for play in Rag'Narok®.

THIS BOX INCLUDES:

FANG OF VILE-TIS (REFERENCE CARD),
MARAUDER OF VILE-TIS (TWO REFERENCE
CARDS).

FANG OF VILE-TIS
RANK: DEVOURER REGULAR.
30 A.P.

MARAUDER OF VILE-TIS
RANK: DEVOURER VETERAN.
40 A.P.



CYFR 03 & 04



THESE BLISTER PACKS INCLUDE:

1 MINIATURE AND 2 CARDS:
CYNWÄLL NOVA (REFERENCE CARD),
LUMINOUS STRANGLEHOLD
(EXPLANATORY CARD).

RANK: CYNWÄLL SPECIAL.
62 A.P.

The nova was holding the door closed with his right hand. Three clones were moving towards him. The construct skewered one with the blade he was holding in one of his left hands, smashed the skull of another one with his second right fist, and decapitated the third one with his last sword. He then let go of the door with his other right hand and got ready to confront the aberration.

The nova is a construct of Large Size standing on a Creature base (37.5 x 37.5 mm). His "Construct," "Ambidextrous," "Sequence/I" and "Additional limb" abilities make him a versatile warrior who can fight his way through enemy infantry and shower large opponents with a hail of blows.



• THE SESSAIRS TRIBES •

BAAR 01



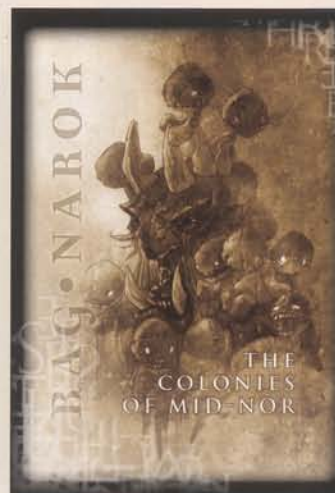
THIS PACK INCLUDES:

16 CARDS: ILLUSTRATION, THE SESSAIRS TRIBES (EXPLANATORY CARD), 6 EXPLANATORY TRIBE CARDS: THE OTHER WORLD, KEL-AN-TIRAIHD, THE CLAN OF THE RAVEN, THE GUARDIANS OF THE SCÄTH, THE HORDE OF MURGAN, THE WOLVES OF AVAGDDU; SESSAIRS CENTAUR (REFERENCE CARD), THORGRIM, MINOTAUR (REFERENCE CARD), HORNED HUNTER (REFERENCE CARD), MANRAIDH, HORNED HUNTER (REFERENCE CARD), SPASM OF FURY (EXPLANATORY CARD), VOICE OF THE EARTH-GODDESS (COMMUNION, 28 A.P.), ELEMENTAL ALLIANCE (RITUAL, 75 A.P.), TORNADO GESA (ARTEFACT, 17 A.P.).

The Sessairs Tribes themed army pack of cards lets you personalize an army of the Kelts of the Sessairs clan using rules and special capacities that are specific to various historical factions. It also includes alternative profiles and other cards made to enhance the savage barbarians of Avagddu's potential.

• THE COLONIES OF MID-NOR •

NMAR 01



THIS PACK INCLUDES:

16 CARDS: ILLUSTRATION, THE COLONIES OF MID-NOR (EXPLANATORY CARD), 6 EXPLANATORY COLONY CARDS: AZAHIR, IBENSETH, KTHAN, SABAHAL, VANGGHOR, SANKUNRÛN; SON OF THE HYDRA (REFERENCE CARD), THE SONS OF THE HYDRA (EXPLANATORY CARD), CRUSADER OF THE ABYSS (REFERENCE CARD), LOST WARRIOR (REFERENCE CARD), PESTILENCE (RITUAL, 30 A.P.), HAND OF THE PUPPETEER (SPELL, 8 A.P.), TROLL SKIN (ARTEFACT, SPECIAL VALUE), PRISON-URN (ARTEFACT, 14 A.P.).

The Colonies of Mid-Nor themed army pack of cards lets you play a personalized Mid-Nor army. It includes six original themes adapted to the various colonies of the world of Aarklash. This supplement also includes alternative profiles, artefacts, a spell and a ritual for Rag'Narok®.



GRIFFINS OF AKKYLANNIE *TEMPLAR WAR-STAFF*



T

he Temple, the armed hand of Akkylannie, is at the front line of the Alliance of Light's battles. In their brothers' eyes, templar officer Severian and his warriors embody faith, tenacity and the holy wrath of the only god, Merin.

Accompanied by templar brothers, this Unit is ready for play in Rag'Narok®. Its numbers can be complemented by Griffin templars.

THIS BOX INCLUDES:

6 MINIATURES AND 6 CARDS:
TEMPLAR BROTHER (REFERENCE CARD),
SEVERIAN, TEMPLAR CHAMPION
(REFERENCE CARD), THE VIGILANTE
(ARTEFACT, 10 A.P.), TEMPLAR STANDARD-
BEARER (REFERENCE CARD), TEMPLAR
MUSICIAN (REFERENCE CARD),
THE TEMPLE'S WAR SONG (TACTIC CARD).

TEMPLAR BROTHER
RANK: GRIFFIN ELITE. TEMPLE.
25 A.P.

SEVERIAN, TEMPLAR CHAMPION
RANK: GRIFFIN ELITE CHAMPION.
64 A.P.

TEMPLAR STANDARD-BEARER
RANK: GRIFFIN ELITE.
23 A.P.

TEMPLAR MUSICIAN
RANK: GRIFFIN ELITE.
23 A.P.





CYNWÄLL ELVES SELSÝM WAR-STAFF



T

he Cynwälls know the Rag'narok's stakes better than anyone else. In their nation every individual is a warrior. Menerän and his loyal war-staff now lead their brothers toward their people's ultimate battle.

Accompanied by Cynwäll selsým veterans, this Unit is ready for play in Rag'narok®. Its numbers can be complemented by a box of Cynwäll selsýms

THIS BOX INCLUDES:

6 MINIATURES AND 6 CARDS.
CYNWÄLL SELSÝM VETERAN (REFERENCE CARD), MENERÄN (REFERENCE CARD), SELSÝM MUSICIAN (REFERENCE CARD), SELSÝM STANDARD-BEARER (REFERENCE CARD), THE DRAGON SCALE (ARTEFACT, 11 A.P.), IMPASSIVE JUSTICE (TACTIC CARD).

CYNWÄLL SELSÝM VETERAN
RANK: CYNWÄLL VETERAN.
24 A.P.

MENERÄN
RANK: CYNWÄLL REGULAR CHAMPION.
60 A.P.

SELSÝM MUSICIAN
RANK: CYNWÄLL REGULAR.
20 A.P.

SELSÝM STANDARD-BEARER
RANK: CYNWÄLL REGULAR.
20 A.P.



Warned by the instinctive clairvoyance that is characteristic of the true disciples of Noesis, Soïm dodged the silent and deadly attack of the two Akkyshan black widows at the very last second. A frenzied dance then began. Blows were exchanged at stupefying speed: the slightest wrong move meant death. That's when the equanimous warrior's lance, guided with faultless precision, struck the throat of the first murderess.

Endowed with Concentration/2 (INI, ATT, DEF and DIS) and Dodge, Soïm is a Zealot Warrior-monk who can take command of a Unit of equanimous warriors or can take on the most formidable foes on his own. His artefacts give him a varied choice of miracles. They also allow him to take several of them when the armies are being built and to modify his Aspect values (1/2/1).

Soïm is supplied with a card explaining the special rules on the Trihedron of Kaïber, the incredible team that he forms with Syd de Kaïber (UKCYCH01) and Nelphaëll (UKCYCH02).



• AIR ELEMENTAL •



Air elementals fly in swarms in the endless skies of their Realms. Known for their great vivacity, they are also famous for their unpredictable mood swings. To them, barriers have no meaning and the slightest constraint can be seen as a threat.

Endowed with INI 7 and the "Flight" ability, the Air elemental opens the skies to the peoples deprived of flying creatures. In addition to the menace it represents, it has two special capacities: "Avatar of storms," which allows it to protect its allies from enemy fire, and "Howling wind," which gives it the "Ethereal" ability. The Air elemental is supplied with eight spells that can be used by magicians who master this Element. Among these is the one used to summon an Air elemental onto the battlefield.

IN THE SNOW COVERED MOUNTAINS OF THE BEHEMOTH...



...AN ORC TRIBE
FIGHTS FOR
ITS SURVIVAL
AND ITS FREEDOM.

A NEW ORC ARMY
WADES INTO THE UNIVERSE
OF CONFRONTATION®
AND RAG'NAROK™.

TREMBLE IN FEAR!



Rosarius could take it no longer. The young Akkylannian conscript couldn't feel his legs and arms any more. On the other hand, the gash on his forehead made him suffer cruelly. He was cursing his leader for having dragged him into this reconnaissance mission. The walls of Kaiber were too far away for them to retreat, so the Griffins would have to confront the horde of undead fighters hot on their tails.

Imitating some of his companions, Rosarius turned around, tightly gripped his mace and said a silent prayer to Merin. He calmly watched as dozens of ghouls and zombies charged his unit, and prepared himself to die for the glory of the One.

At the last moment the living-dead fighters interrupted their charge. A blinding light that had appeared from nowhere had paralysed them. When Rosarius spun around to see where this light was coming from, he was also blinded. For a moment he thought that Merin himself had come to save his faithful.

The Cynwäll army was marching down the hill. The sun was no longer reflected in their shiny armour, and the Griffins and living-dead could now see the Dragons of Lanever. A discipline of steel seemed to rule in the Cynwälls' ranks, strengthened by the harmony of their weapons and uniforms.

The elves were no longer marching, they were rushing down the side of the hill and were charging the Acheronian troops in an eerie silence. Galvanised, Rosarius and his companions-in-arms followed suit.

Showing implacable determination, the Cynwälls thrust deep into the horde of Darkness. Adorned with the light of the sun, their units became shiny blades plunging into the mass of ghouls and zombies.

Seeing this spectacle, Rosarius stopped fighting for a moment. He was now convinced that the Cynwälls' magic didn't come from their constructs or their strange mysticism, but truly from the Light that they bore inside themselves.

THE COLOURS OF WAR UNDER THE LIGHT

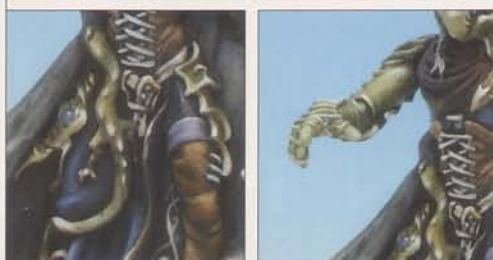
INTRODUCTION

The goal of this article is to explain the Rackham studio's methods concerning the Cynwäll elves' paintjob. Because it was a new army, it was necessary to give deep thought to its colour scheme and ambiance.

The Cynwälls being the most fervent representatives of Light, their colours had to reflect this aspect, all the while underlining the elves' enigmatic side. Bizarre effects and uncommon colours had to be found to accentuate the strangeness of these fighters. The army's character and spirit had to be reflected in its colours.

The first Cynwäll miniature was Syd de Kaiber, the main character in the novel *The Fault of Kaiber*. To begin with a Character, who is furthermore a commander, is not the usual way Rackham works. Usually regular troops are done first, which allows the basic colour scheme for the whole army to be determined.

In Syd's case, the studio's painters were inspired by the Character's history. This Cynwäll hero fights for Light, yet his artefact (the Echyron) makes a part of his Dark side come forward. So it seemed logical to us to give him a colour scheme made up of sombre and luminous shades. His clothes are therefore dark, but the rest of the miniature is bright: the white



mask, the artefact's old gold and the lunar shades of his sword are all elements that are found on a part of the Cynwälls, albeit sometimes worked differently. As for Syd's clothes, they give him a melancholic and solitary look. The whole is heightened using rich and colourful tones, as well as with complex decorations that amplify his commander status.



SELSÿMS

Regulars allow the whole army's basic colour scheme to be defined. The studio's painters compare their ideas to determine the best choice of colours. Once this has been done, all they have to do is get to work!

In the selsÿms' case, white was the first choice for the most visible parts. The black clothes allow for a sharp contrast. All that was missing was a colour to enhance the whole, since black and white aren't really colours. Orange, the studio's first choice for

SYNCHRONÿMES

The synchronÿmes' aspect is similar to that of the selsÿms, yet with a few changes made to the paintjob. They being Warrior-mages, they had to be slightly differentiated, all the while remaining in the same tones as Regulars. White was therefore a mainstay, as well as green and blue.

The armour's arabesques are lighter and the blue background is more marked than for the selsÿms.

AZURE HUNTERS

Being Veterans, the azure hunters had to remain simple. Their clothes are painted in shades that bring to mind the miniature's name. The dominating blue colour contrasts with the crossbow's gold that, for the sake of coherence, is the same one as used for Syd's artefact. The red hair also stands out from the rest of the miniature to give it depth.

It is preferable to use a few bright colours when the miniature is mainly pale to make it more readable.



the launch of this army, was too "acid" compared to the rather pastel tones of the rest of the miniature. Once this was corrected by using only pastel tones, the army's basic colour scheme had been found.

For the overall treatment of these miniatures a new visual style was needed, which is why their armour was painted in pearly tones, thus giving them a poetic and faded air. The clothes were worked like simple cloth in black to make it stand out from the armour. For the spear's shaft the studio decided on a purplish blue-grey, and for its blades on a very light bluish metal. The blue created an interesting contrast with the pale yellow of the loincloth and armbands.

For the face a shade of ivory skin (as well as filled eyes) was chosen to strengthen the miniature's icy and mysterious aspect.

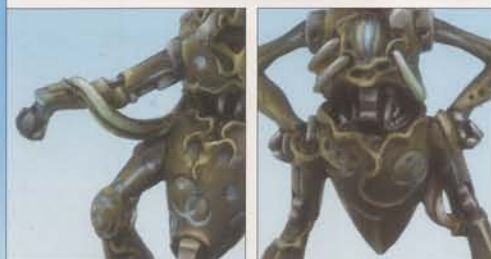
CONSTRUCT WARRIORS

The method used for the Constructs' paintjob is simple. In order to distinguish these machines from the "living" fighters, their colour scheme is different. It can therefore be used for all future Constructs to get a homogenous visual effect specific to automatons. This lets the elves' Constructs be more easily identified within their army.



In order to preserve the overall coherence, the colours are the same as those already used for other miniatures (especially for their equipment).

In fact, the principle of the negative is used. The elves' armour being light, it is dark on the automatons. Their clothes, on the other hand, are light in contrast.



Other important point: the Construct's structure has to be defined with the help of colours. The hydraulic tubes, gears and articulations (internal parts) are painted in shades of grey with a greasy effect that is gotten by using a thin brown wash (to colour the steel) and adding glossy black in the hollows. The armour plates (external parts) are painted old bronze colour. A "magic" effect is added to this (by adding blue into the armour's engravings and to the eyes), which creates a play of colours between the armour's light yellow tone and the blue added to the hollows.

ASADARS

The asadars are a majestic elite corps and thus deserve special treatment. The idea is to get a range of shades for the whole miniature that change with the movement and the lighting. To paint this effect, one first has to apply the armour's basic colour, and then add the basic shade of gold. Then all of the armour is shaded (the golden and pearly parts). A final shading of the pearly parts (in the hollows) is done with the violet used on the golden parts. The golden parts are then made lighter, and then are the pearly parts (by slightly overlapping with the gold). Thus the colours blend and give the impression that the pearly parts dominate and that the gold is just a reflection.



For the robe's drape, there is still the same idea of changing colours. Shades of blue, green, grey and orange bring to mind a sunset or a stormy evening sky. The drape's paintjob reflects the asadars' light weight and avoids making the miniature seem heavier and overfilled. Visually the asadars perfectly integrate the rest of the army while presenting obvious differences.





NELPHAËLL

To paint this other character of *The Fault of Kaiber*, the colours described in the novel were used, especially for the mask (honey colour), the hair and the crossbow (both golden). For her clothes the colours are similar to those used for Syd. Her armour is painted using the same colours as for the rest of the army (for more coherence).



Her mask, the upper part of her arm and her construct were painted the same colour to show that these elements are part of a whole.

And finally, the dark clothes give Nelphaëll a discreet appearance and also remind of the azure hunters' blue.

GALHYAN, CYNWÄLL HELIAST

The tones used to paint this Adept remind of those used for the rest of the army. Thus, his armour is identical to that of the selsÿms and the draped robe is similar to the asadars'. The main differences lie in the colour of his collar and the plaque in front of his belly, which is slightly more blue-green to make them stand out better from the rest.



The tricky part was to avoid "burying" his face. The darker backdrop of the collar and the golden crown fit with the blue to let the face stand out.



VARSŸMS

For the varsŷms the idea was to create a nighttime atmosphere that brings *The Thousand and One Nights* to mind (for the miniature's scout aspect) and to preserve the overall harmony thanks to their armour. The clothes' dark blue-green tones are treated as if moonlight were shining on them. The blades' gold going on silver lets them contrast with the clothes (the yellow gold stands out from the blue). These miniatures being fairly unburdened and very dynamic, their paintjob shouldn't alter them or weigh them down.



EQUANIMOUS WARRIORS

The equanimes are very original miniatures that, due to their apparent complexity, may seem difficult to treat. Above all, one must study their structure and distinguish the "material" zones from those that are turning into clouds of smoke. Once the miniature has been understood, all that's left to do is let oneself go with the flow.

The idea is that the chopped up areas are changing shape and follow the curls of smoke, as if the matter were being pulled towards a point of gravity and were dissolving into the air.



Adding light pastel tones lets one accentuate the impression of movement: a ghostly green is applied to the cut-up zones to evoke a "magical" effect.



First the material zones, such as skin, armour, clothes and weapons, are treated. Most of these areas are painted with the colours already used for the other troops, except for the spear's shaft, which requires a stark colour in order to contrast with the pale colours of the other parts (always with readability in mind).

Then the colours are blended on the curls of smoke or stretched while following the smoke's curves to get a "cloudy" effect. The masses of air are painted in pale shades of yellow to avoid getting them confused with the various elements. The miniature shouldn't appear to be monochromatic, so one should avoid putting too dark colours in the hollows (to preserve its "immaterial" aspect).

ALTERNATIVE CYNWÄLL SCHEME

The studio's painters have also painted several miniatures following their own inspiration to get more personal variations.





PAINTING GUIDE CYNWÄLL SELSÏM

The selsÏms are the backbone of the Cynwäll armies. These warriors of Light proudly rise against the hordes of Darkness, ready to confront evil wherever it may hide.

The beauty of these elves' armour and equipment reflects their noble soul and their implacable determination in combat.

PREPARATION

The Cynwäll elves are among the finest and most detailed of the Rackham range of miniatures, so particular care is required for their preparation and for the insertion of the pins that hold the various parts together.

It is important to take one's time when trimming off the moulding mark so as to avoid damaging the armour's decoration, to "pin" carefully with a thin drill bit to strengthen the most fragile parts (ankles, wrists), and to make sure that the various parts are adjusted with precision for them to fit together correctly.

Because the colours used to paint this miniature are mainly light ones, the undercoat has to be white.



BASE COLOURS

The base colours are applied in several thin consecutive layers of diluted paint (while taking care not to clog up the details). They must be very opaque to preserve the miniature's clean appearance and to avoid effects of transparency.



A dark brown-red wash is applied in the hollows to accentuate their depth and to counter the blue of the lighter parts.

Pure light-grey is used to mark the most protuberant folds and make them stand out.

The face is done at the beginning due to the crown framing it, which will then be painted the same colour as the armour.

The appearance sought for the face is an icy paleness that reflects the Cynwälls' austere and brooding character.

CLOTHES AND FACE

The finesse of the details on a miniature such as the selsÏm warriors' requires that some parts (like the clothes and the face) be worked before the armour is painted, due to the risk of making them too tricky to reach.

The clothes are treated as if made of fine cloth with a certain sheen to make their folds stand out. The black is made lighter using dark blue going on grey, and then with light grey. A thin black wash is then applied to blend the shading and make the passage from the dark tones to the light tones softer.



A warm beige base is applied to contrast with the armour's cold tones.

The skin is darkened by adding a drop of dark brown to the beige, which will make his complexion greyer and accentuate his stern expression.

The lightening is done using cream white going on ivory to give a porcelain-like aspect to the skin.

The hair is painted bluish grey and highlighted using light grey to give it a silvery appearance.

The eyes are painted turquoise, without pupils. Only two white spots give direction, sparkle and intensity to their mysterious gaze.

ARMOUR AND SHIELD

These very decorated parts make up the most of the miniature's surface. A pearly and precious finish gives a refined image and suggests the finesse and expertise of elven craftsmanship.

Blue-green is applied in the shadows of the volumes.

This operation consists of shading the base colour through consecutive transparent layers.

The brush strokes should be directed in such a way that the pigments are concentrated in the darkest parts to intensify the colour.

The same operation is done with bluish grey (or bluish violet) in the hollows while playing with the tones to create a pearly effect.

The armour's arabesques are made to stand out using this technique, which makes the pattern of the decorations even more readable.

The same principle is used for lightening using light beige and then glossy white for the final shine. This makes the pearly appearance look realistic.

The final highlighting is not done by adding sparkles, like on metallic armour, but rather by having the reflection of light follow the parts of the miniature that stick out.



In case of uncontrolled stains one just has to slightly wet the paintbrush and quickly erase the mistake while avoiding drenching the zone with too much water.

LOINCLOTH AND ARMBANDS

Desert yellow made darker with a mix of brown and orange, and then made lighter with light beige, creates a tone that stands out from the rest of the miniature without clashing with the armour's colour.

The sword's bluish hue answers to the yellow cream of the loincloth.



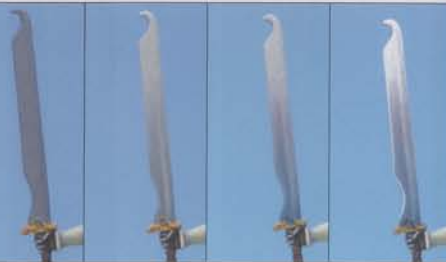
WEAPONS AND DETAILS

The sword's bluish grey base is made lighter using light grey, and then shaded and tinted again using the base colour for a better blending and a mineral appearance.

Blue and then transparent red are used as light washes to colour the blade's base.

The metal's final shine is given using glossy white.

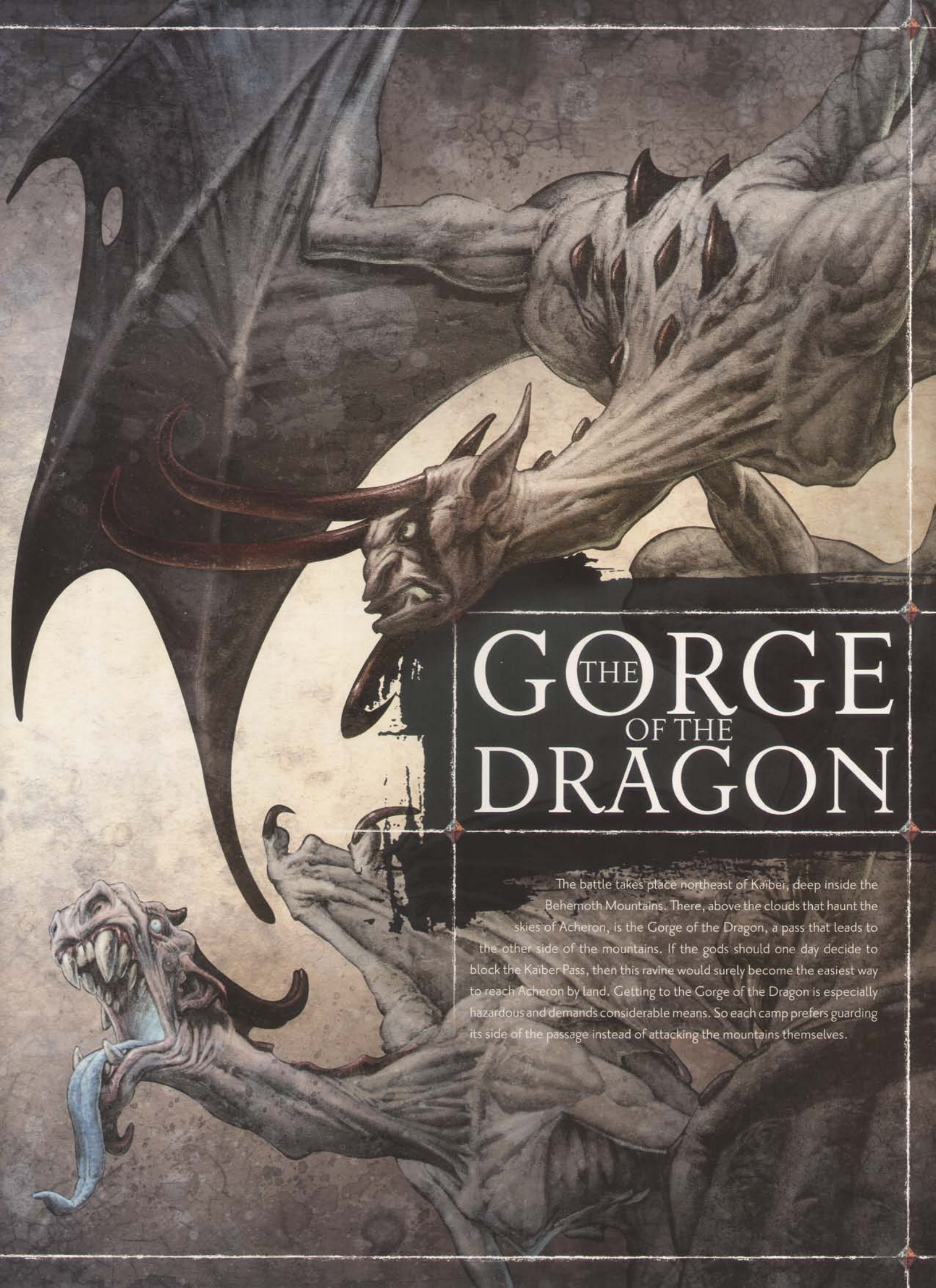
The hilt and the guard are painted with warm and contrasting colours.



“
The Dragon is going to war...
”







THE GORGE OF THE DRAGON

The battle takes place northeast of Kaiber, deep inside the Behemoth Mountains. There, above the clouds that haunt the skies of Acheron, is the Gorge of the Dragon, a pass that leads to the other side of the mountains. If the gods should one day decide to block the Kaiber Pass, then this ravine would surely become the easiest way to reach Acheron by land. Getting to the Gorge of the Dragon is especially hazardous and demands considerable means. So each camp prefers guarding its side of the passage instead of attacking the mountains themselves.



THE SERVANTS OF THE ECHYRION

UNIT AL 01: The Noble Scourges

- Syd de Kaiber, the Hero of Kaiber, equipped with the Noble Echyrion
- 12 Cynwäll asadars

UNIT AL 02: First Selsým Brotherhood

- 16 Cynwäll selsýms, of which one is Leader

UNIT AL 03: Second Selsým Brotherhood

- 16 Cynwäll selsýms, of which one is Leader

UNIT AL 04: The Masters of Time

- Gathyan with the Solar Crown (artefact), Solar Army (ritual) and Chain of Automations (spell)
- 1 Cynwäll synchronime
- 8 Cynwäll akhamiäls
- Nelphaëll

UNIT AL 05: Imperial Battery ⁽¹⁾

- 2 Griffin culverins
- 4 Griffin cannon servants

UNIT AL 06: The Falconer of Kaiber

- Aldenyss the Silent, the Falconer of Kaiber, with Silentz

UNIT AL 07: The Judges of the Griffin

- 5 thallion riders, of which one is Leader

ARMY COST: 1996 A.P. for 68 miniatures.

WILLEM: "My army is mobile. It has an average strike force. However, my Units are able to keep a maximum number of troops engaged in combat for a pretty long time. The cannons are new to me. We'll see how things go with them. Because they are culverins (STR 20), I will use them mainly to kill enemy Characters. I'm counting on the mines placed by the Griffin servants and on my akhamiäls to defend the cannons at close range."



Four, they were only four left on duty in the small fort. The high command had emptied all the outposts of the Gorge of the Dragon to reinforce the numbers at the Kaiber fortress. The battle that had taken place there several months earlier had been horrendous. Light had triumphed, yet at the price of great losses.

The delivery of fresh supplies was just barely ensured, so they could forget about reinforcements. "Four artillerymen left there to take care of the cannons," they had said. Ha! Four old soldiers charged with blowing everything up should anyone try to take them! Yet that was unimportant. Ever since their basic training they knew that the culverins were more important than their servants. They accepted this truth for the love of Merin and of Akkylannie.

Lucius was the first one to make out a strange shape appearing from the clouds further below. Barely had he opened his mouth to alert his companions when a multitude of stone towers of all shapes and sizes rose through the agitated clouds. A castle... A gigantic castle was floating in the sky, its strangely angled walls crackling with bolts of lightning. A cry of alarm was heard.

A strong hand grabbed him by the shoulder and the cry brutally went still. Lucius spun around, ready to fight to the death against Death, who had beautiful blond hair and was wearing a mask of mother-of-pearl. Her gaze expressed no feelings.

"Soldier! My name is Nelphaëll, officer of Lanever on special assignment. In the name of the Alliance of Light, Syd de Kaiber requisitions you, you and your cannons. Take your positions and get ready to fire."

The three other artillerymen were with Nelphaëll. Köln, the most experienced of them, looked Lucius straight in the eyes and spoke to him with a firm voice.

"Get moving, old buddy. I don't know how or why, but Merin has sent the Cynwälls to help us defend this gorge. Grab that cannonball and let's make the One proud of us!"



(1): The 25% that can be devoted to war machines include the servants' Strategic Values.



THE ARMY OF THE INSANE

UNIT LD 01: The Insane Scavengers

- The Lord of Insanity equipped with the Seal of Phobos, the Spectre's Rags, Fireball, Elemental Conversion and Carpet of Flames
- 6 scavengers of Acheron

UNIT LD 02: The Sons of the Pale One

- 4 Wolfen zombies

UNIT LD 03: The Immortal Horde

- 1 quaestor of Acheron (Leader) equipped with an Orb of Obscurity
- 20 zombie warriors

UNIT LD 04: Melmoth's Vault

- Melmoth, Crâne warrior (Second Incarnation), equipped with Horns of Damnation
- 1 quaestor of Acheron (Leader) equipped with an Orb of Obscurity
- 27 morbid puppets

UNIT LD 05: Alderan's Vault

- Aldéran, Alderan, Crâne warrior, equipped with Horns of Damnation
- 1 quaestor of Acheron (Leader) equipped with an Orb of Obscurity
- 27 morbid puppets

UNIT LD 06: S'Erum, ophidian sydion

- S'Erum, ophidian sydion (Leader), equipped with 18, his artefact, and an ophidian vorpal blade

ARMY COST: 1994 A.P. for 91 miniatures

NICOLAS: "Willem and I built our armies without knowing the scenario. I therefore remained loyal to my usual composition schemes: two-thirds of 'normal' troops (morbid puppets and zombie warriors) led by modest Leaders, charged with engaging most of the enemy fighters, and one third of 'extraordinary' troops (Wolfen zombies and scavengers of Acheron), who are powerful and fast when possible, to reach the objectives or strike a decisive blow wherever I decide to. For this the Lord of Insanity has unusual spells. He is the only magician in a very mobile Unit, so I want him to be able to inflict great damage at short and medium range as quickly as possible.

The 2/3 – 1/3 proportions are not completely respected, for, like all gamers, I have my little quirks. One of these was to take S'Erum. The gamers who know him won't have forgotten to add 10 A.P. to his strategic value to allow him to benefit from his adoptive army's leadership."

Only a madman would attempt to cross the Gorge of the Dragon. Yet exactly that is Asura de Sarlath, the Lord of Insanity's plan. And this Father of Acheron is even more ambitious yet: he will cross the pass with the Claw of his wicked House, his lair, an unimaginable edifice floating in the sky and travelling with the winds.

The ritual required for this insane enterprise to be carried out isn't risk free. It demands so much energy that the Sarlaths' flying fortress will be vulnerable during the whole journey. If they fail, the Sarlaths won't have a second chance.

The Claw of Terror's itinerary follows a magical path created over the decades by the necromancers of Sarlath. Statues of gargoyles on which evil symbols are engraved serve as bearing points for the navigation between the lofty peaks of the Behemoth Mountains. The destruction of a single of these beacons would endanger the success of this enterprise.

Syd de Kaïber had been informed of the Lord of Insanity's project by a mysterious missive sent from Cadwallon. Not having had the time to identify its sender, nor to warn the authorities at Kaïber, he gathered an armed force of loyal fighters and travelled to the Gorge of the Dragon as quickly as possible. The Servants of the Echyron are now the only ones who can prevent the Sarlaths' flying fortress from embarking on the conquest of the skies of Aarklash.



THE BATTLEFIELD



SPECIAL RULES

IN MEDIA RES The game begins with the forces of Darkness appearing from the fog surrounding the fort of the Alliance of Light. The alarm is sounded and the first orders are given.

No cards are used before the miniatures are deployed: they are placed directly onto the battlefield.

The two armies are deployed anywhere on the battlefield within 20 cm or more of the Alliance of Light's fort.

The Light player must deploy the Unit of Griffin cannons and another Unit of his choice inside the fort.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE 1

The Acheron player wins one victory point for every Griffin cannon that is out of order at the end of the game. A wooden "fort" belonging to the Alliance of Light is placed at the middle of one of the edges of the battlefield. For obvious practical reasons, fighters can move through it. A fighter can end his movement touching the element of the scenery representing the fort of Light. During the following movement phase he can step over it as if it were normal ground.

- The walls do not block the lines of sight of the troops standing inside the fort.
- A fighter cannot remain standing "inside" a wall. If he doesn't have enough movement potential available to cross the wall completely, then he doesn't cross it and stops as closely as possible to it.
- The thickness of the walls is not taken into account for the rules on Unit cohesion. Thus, a Unit can end up being split in two on either side of the wall.

OBJECTIVE 2

The Acheron player wins one victory point if he manages to eliminate Syd de Kaiber. He wins another one if the Wound that killed Syd de Kaiber was inflicted by S'Erum, the mysterious sender of the letter that lured the Cynwall into this trap.

OBJECTIVE 3

The Light player wins one victory point for every Idol of Nightmares destroyed. Two of these "gargoyle of Acheron" nexuses are placed on the battlefield as shown in the diagram. Because of their mandatory deployment and the advantages provided to the forces of Light by their fort, the gargoyles don't cost the Acheron camp any A.P.

OBJECTIVE 4

The Light player wins one victory point if he manages to eliminate S'Erum. He wins another one if the Wound that killed the sydion was inflicted by Syd de Kaiber.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

This scenario is to be played in **six rounds**.

In case of a draw, victory belongs to the player with the most A.P. remaining in play.

IDOL OF NIGHTMARES

Allegiance: Acheron, special.

Trial: 9

Sacrifice: 101.

Area of effect: 15 cm.

Base: 5 x 5

Access: 10 cm.

Duration: Until end of round.

Loads: 3/1.

Structure: 6

Resilience: 8

An Idol of Nightmares can only be activated by Acheron fighters with POW, Aspects or Character status.

All enemy fighters/Units located even partially within 15 cm or less of a successfully activated Idol of Nightmares suffer a -1 on the final result of all their Courage tests. This penalty is not cumulative if the victims are in the area of effect of several Idols of Nightmares.

Abilities: Deployment/Scout

Quantity: 300



APPROACH AND DEPLOYMENT



Willem and Nicolas proceed with the Tactical roll. Nicolas gets the lead since Willem's roll gets a $\square$.

WILLEM: "Seeing we're deploying the miniatures directly, this will make things more complicated. The Cynwalls' charging distances might turn to my disadvantage."

NICOLAS: "The Acheronians aren't used to getting the tactical advantage, so being able to benefit from it during deployment is a true blessing! After having thought about it, I asked Willem to place his first Unit first so that I can place mine in favourable conditions."

WILLEM: "Nicolas let me deploy first. This allowed me to avoid a few disappointments as well as to block access to the cannons. I'll attract several thousands of Living-dead to the middle of the battlefield with Syd de Kaiber. As for the rest... it's chaos! Because my charging distances are very big, I had a very hard time placing my fighters. That's why my thallions are located so far to the side. I have also placed my mines in front of the cannons to protect them from the first enemy onslaught."



THE SERVANTS OF THE ECHYRION

- AL 01 The Noble Scourges
- AL 02 First Selsym Brotherhood
- AL 03 Second Selsym Brotherhood
- AL 04 The Masters of Time
- AL 05 Imperial Battery
- AL 06 The Falconer of Kaiber
- AL 07 The Judges of the Griffin



THE ARMY OF THE INSANE

- LD 01 The Insane Scavengers
- LD 02 The Sons of the Pale One
- LD 03 The Immortal Horde
- LD 04 Melmoth's Vault
- LD 05 Alderan's Vault
- LD 06 S'Erum, ophidian sydion

THE RED DRAGON'S OPINION

Nicolas's decision is strange. By playing first he could have placed a Unit near the fort and thus avoid a painful progression under fire of the Griffin culverins. Furthermore, that would have considerably hindered Willem's deployment by preventing him from deploying in a vast perimeter around the objective to defend.



NICOLAS: "Everything went pretty much as planned. I deployed my forces in such a way as to be able to attack the fort from a maximum number of angles with my fast-moving troops. The slower ones will remain near the nexuses to protect them and bog down enemy Units. I also took advantage of this to deploy my biggest Units in such a way as to hinder Willem's deployment. A winning strategy! The backs of the nexuses are protected better than I thought and certain Units of Light are confined to the furthest corners of the battlefield. This marvelously simulates the hurried arrival of the Servants of the Echyron."

The Lord of Insanity's position allows him to transmit his dark stranglehold to a maximum of Units. If he has to leave his position to attack the fort, then the Crane warriors, assisted by the quaeators, will take over locally."



STRATEGY THE GORGE OF THE DRAGON

ROUND 1

WILLEM: "I'm going to advance to try to delay the attack on the fort as long as possible. I don't have enough Units... If I limit myself to defending my positions, I'll end up being overwhelmed. Therefore I'll launch an assault with most of my forces and count on my rearguard Unit to destroy the eastern idol. My thallion cavalry will move around the enemy army to riddle the western idol with bullets!"

NICOLAS: "My strategy is a simple one: prevent Willem from engaging my fast-moving Units and, once the enemy is bogged down by small fry, proceed with the division of Units to sow chaos so dear to the House of Sarlath. I won't have the advantage of movement, so things will be close. The selsÿms deployed at the rear may cause me some trouble: I will eliminate them as quickly as possible with the Lord of Insanity. Receiving a scorching death from the hands of a Father of Acheron is a privilege that the Cynwälls will know to value."

Nicolas spends gems of Darkness to ensure the dark stranglehold of his Commander-in-chief and Leaders:

- The Lord of Insanity sacrifices two gems to give his Unit a DIS of 2.

- The quaestor in Melmoth's Vault sacrifices four gems to give his a DIS of 4. The quaestor in Alderan's Vault does the same.

In the **first firing and incantation phase** the Unit of Griffin thallions carries out a "Move and fire" order. Thanks to the combination of Harassment and Instinctive Fire, they can resolve this order quickly with a firing difficulty increased by two points. The riders launch their attack. Their bullets fly into the ranks of the Living-dead. Two morbid puppets collapse. Their bones crash to the ground, making a sinister sound.

The other Units go into action. The Cynwäll Units don't waste any time: with a charge they engage all the enemy troops standing in front of them! Showing exemplary courage, not one of them retreats in face of the danger. At the end of this first round of movement almost all Units are in contact with the enemy.

In the **second firing and incantation phase**, S'Erum fires at the cannon servants standing in the Alliance of Light's fort. One of them is killed. A second one escapes death even though he was in the trajectory of this shot made using perforating artillery.

WILLEM: "OK! Move and fire for them in the next round."

NICOLAS: "What a shame to have failed my second Damage roll and then the Toxic/5 one. The elimination of the four servants, who were so courteously lined up by Willem, was within reach. The perforating artillery's surprise effect was foiled by an unlucky roll of the dice. Oh well, that's the game!"

The Lord of Insanity starts casting terrifying spells while grabbing hold of his gems. Eight of his gems of Air are converted into five gems of Fire thanks to Elemental Conversion. The Master of the barony of Acheron unleashes a carpet of flames at the Second Selsÿm Brotherhood (AL 03)... Five warriors of Light are killed in action.

WILLEM: "That's normal, seeing this Character's strength. But why doesn't he use the nexus's power to push back my troops?"

NICOLAS: "Simply because I don't want to have to pursue them. Their elimination will be ever so quicker if the Lord of Insanity doesn't have to move. He surely doesn't feel like hanging around over here!"

The Lord of Insanity doesn't stop at that. He summons a fireball, which he shoots from his fleshless fingers at a Cynwäll asadar. Not far from here, Syd de Kaïber escapes death while two asadars perish by his side.

The imperial battery opens fire: the first culverin targets the Lord of Insanity while its neighbour sends a cannonball flying towards one of the nexuses. Failure and... failure. The two shots miss their target. Nelphaëll fires at Alderan, hits him, yet doesn't inflict him with a Wound.



THE SERVANTS OF THE ECHYRION
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THE ARMY OF THE INSANE
 LD 01a The Insane Scavengers
 LD 01b The Scavengers of Acheron
 LD 02 The Sons of the Pale One
 LD 03 The Immortal Horde
 LD 04a Morbid Puppets
 LD 04b Melmoth
 LD 05 Alderan's Vault
 LD 06 S'Erum, ophidian sydion

NICOLAS: "So that's the famous gunpowder, the secret given to the Griffins by the Cynwälls? Wow, how scary... But seriously, I always recommend firing at Units for which the chances to hit/target value ratio is the highest. Cannonballs (STR 20/perforating heavy artillery) would have done great damage in the Units of morbid puppets or of zombie warriors, with chances of hitting that are surely better and with more immediate effects."

THE RED DRAGON'S OPINION

Advice that is ever the wiser since in this case the Lord of Insanity's death wouldn't have given the Servants of the Echyron a single point.



During the **hand-to-hand combat phase** several frays take place:

1) The **Sons of the Pale One** (LD 02) versus the **First Selsým Brotherhood** (AL 02): The Cynwälls finish off a Wolfen zombie who doesn't manage to regenerate. Nicolas attempts a division during the ensuing thrust movement... yet without success.

NICOLAS: "Darn! That stroke of bad luck delays my plans."

2) **Melmoth** (LD 04b) versus the **Judges of the Griffin** (AL 07): The zombie warriors' blows come raining down on the proud thallions, yet without causing the slightest loss. The riders take advantage of this to reload their pistols.

3) The **Immortal Horde** (LD 03) and **Alderan's Vault** (LD 05) versus the **Noble Scourges** (AL 01): This fray is described in detail on page 40.

During the **mana recovery phase** the Lord of Insanity doesn't manage to activate the rebirth of his gems (failure!). Galhyan and the synchronime accompanying him make theirs go into resonance: their stones reach the maximum level of their potential.

WILLEM: "I pushed the front as far as I could, but I don't know if I'll be able to hold out for long. The first results are encouraging, yet with two downsides: 1. The Lord of Insanity is way too powerful for my selsýms. 2. I fear that they won't be strong enough to destroy the idol. As for S'Erum, he is too well placed for my taste, so I'll urgently have to take care of him."

NICOLAS: "Chance had it that I got bad results on crucial rolls: S'Erum's Damage rolls, the division of the Wolfen zombie Unit during its thrust, and the Lord of Insanity's mana recovery. This bad luck endangers my strategy's coordination. It spices up the game, yet in the heat of the action I hate it. To use the favourite expression of one of my childhood heroes: 'I love it when a plan comes together!'"

Yet something really gives me satisfaction: Willem has attacked my zombie warriors with his Cynwäll asadars, who are less in numbers but a lot more expensive in army points. By the time they shake them loose, my other Units will be far away..."



STRANGLEHOLD

Constructs and the Living-dead are collectively known as "Receptacles." They do not have Discipline. The "Leadership/X" ability of their commanders has no influence on the "living" and vice versa (no basic Orders, no transmission of the commander's COM/FEAR and DIS, etc.). However, a Commander-in-Chief can transmit to his Units the additional Orders acquired when making the tactical roll.

Seeing that they don't have a reference DIS, the performing of manoeuvres and movements that require a Discipline test becomes risky. This disadvantage is compensated by the stranglehold: by spending mana gems, certain commanders can give these fighters temporary DIS.

A Receptacle benefits from the stranglehold that he generates.

Additional Orders

Strangleholds allow Orders to be given to Units of Receptacles.

After the tactical roll and before the attribution of Orders, the Commander-in-Chief can, if he is able to generate strangleholds, spend gems from his reserve or from an artefact. He acquires one additional Order for every two gems spent. These Orders can only be given to friendly Units of Receptacles.

Unused Orders are lost.

Increase of Discipline

A stranglehold allows compensation for the Receptacles' absence of DIS by giving them a temporary value in this characteristic.

At the beginning of the movement phase, a fighter able to generate strangleholds can transform one or

several of his gems (Light/Darkness) into as many points of the equivalent stranglehold.

This value is the temporary DIS of the friendly Receptacles in the same Unit as the fighter generating the stranglehold. The stranglehold produced by commanders is transmitted to Units within their leadership range. Any penalties caused by difference in rank between the fighter generating the stranglehold and the Receptacles do not apply.

The points in DIS gained thanks to the stranglehold disappear at the end of the round.

Luminous Stranglehold

The following Cynwälls can generate luminous strangleholds by spending gems of Light:

- Cynwäll magicians/Warrior-mages who master the path of salaris
- Cynwäll magicians/Warrior-mages who master the path of chronamancy
- Cynwäll fighters equipped with an Orb of Clarity

Luminous stranglehold is a Discipline substitute for Constructs.

Dark Stranglehold

The following magicians of Acheran can generate dark strangleholds by spending gems of Darkness:

- Magicians/Warrior-mages of Acheran who master the path of necramancy
- Magicians/Warrior-mages of Acheran who master the path of circaeus;
- Fighters of Acheran equipped with an Orb of Obscurity

Dark stranglehold is a Discipline substitute for the Living-dead.



Before proceeding with the Tactical roll, Nicolas announces that S'Erum will be using I8.

Willem gets the lead. The orders are attributed. Nicolas decides to impress Willem by dividing a maximum number of Units during the movement phase. The Cynwäll selsÿms continue their advance towards their objective. At the end of this round practically all Units are in contact. The Second Selsÿm Brotherhood (AL 03) is ordered to charge the Lord of Insanity. Unfortunately for Willem, it is struck by fear by this emissary of the Dark principle.

I8

I8 gives S'Erum the "Harassment" ability. Use of this capacity must be announced before making a tactical roll. S'Erum can then no longer move until the end of the round. In return, the S+R of the first Damage roll caused by a shot made using I8 during the round is increased by a number points equal to the final result of the Dim test (max: +18).

If the shot should happen to inflict further Damage rolls on consecutive additional victims thanks to the rules on perforating light artillery, then the weapon's S+R is calculated based on its value as modified by this bonus.

THE RED DRAGON'S OPINION

Having the scavengers charge the selsÿms who were already busy fighting the Wolfen zombies may not have been necessary. The three remaining Wolfen zombies could have held out against the Cynwälls without outside help. This would have allowed Nicolas to take advantage of his horsemen's speed to make an additional threat weigh down on the Griffin cannons.



WILLEM: "I'm increasing the pressure on Nicolas's troops. I'll redirect my cannons to fire at S'Erum and try to free some of my asadars so they can destroy the idol. For the moment the advance is contained. Let's hope it lasts. I'll move Aldenyss the Silent closer to the fort so that he can participate in its defence and that he can give Consciousness to Galhyan thanks to his falcon, Silentz. I'll let Nelphaëll leave the Unit of the Masters of Time so that she can engage the ophidian sydion in hand-to-hand combat. If I don't kill this Elder, I'll at least prevent him from shooting."

During the **second firing and incantation phase** Nelphaëll invests two Concentration/X points in Initiative to be able to shoot before S'Erum does. Alas, her crossbow shot fails.

As for the sydion, he fires at the imperial battery's gunners and eliminates a second servant.

NICOLAS: "If the cannons fire at S'Erum, they don't fire at other more important Units (strategically speaking). If they shoot anywhere else, the sydion will continue on his extermination rampage. Forcing the opponent to having to choose between several top targets is so much fun."

WILLEM: "I'll make use of Aldenyss to correct that! Nicolas seems to believe that I'm making a mistake by firing at S'Erum. I don't think so because he is worth one victory point and, as usual, I give privilege to the scenario. I would have fired at the troops if I had had artillery with zone effect instead of perforating artillery."

The Lord of Insanity begins a series of wicked incantations. Thanks to Elemental Conversion, he gets seven gems of Fire. A new carpet of flames falls onto two other Cynwäll selsÿms.

The imperial battery is redirected and then opens fire at the ophidian, yet the culverin's shot fails.

WILLEM: "These Griffin cannons visibly need an artillery officer to be fully efficient. What a shame that the war machine limitations don't allow me to include any in my army!"

NICOLAS: "Willem's judgement might be a bit hasty. Though it's true that an artillery officer further increases the danger represented by a battery of cannons, we must admit that our die rolls have been rather disastrous and just make a bad situation worse. The pressure is rising..."

During the **hand-to-hand combat phase** there are five frays:

- 1) **Melmoth's Vault** (LD 04) versus the **Judges of the Griffin** (AL 07): The bones of the three morbid puppets turn back to dust. Willem divides his Unit to be able to take advantage of the mobility of his mounted troops. So three thallion judges leave the fray.
- 2) The **Sons of the Pale One** (LD 02) and the **Scavengers of Acheron** (LD 01b) versus the **First Selsÿm Brotherhood** (AL 02): The Acheron troops' coordinated assaults send four Cynwäll selsÿms to their grave.
- 3) The **Lord of Insanity** (LD 01a) versus the **Second Selsÿm Brotherhood** (AL 03a): The Lord of Insanity kills one Cynwäll selsÿm.
- 4) The **Second Selsÿm Brotherhood** (AL 03b) versus a nexus: No damage.



THE SERVANTS OF THE ECHYRION

- AL 01 The Noble Scourges
- AL 02 First Selsým Brotherhood
- AL 03a Cynwäll Selsýms
- AL 03b Cynwäll Selsýms
- AL 04a The Masters of Time
- AL 04b Nelphaëll
- AL 05 Imperial Battery
- AL 06 The Falconer of Kaïber
- AL 07a The Judges of the Griffin
- AL 07b The Judges of the Griffin

THE ARMY OF THE INSANE

- LD 01a The Insane Scavengers
- LD 01b The Scavengers of Acheron
- LD 02 The Sons of the Pale One
- LD 03 The Immortal Horde
- LD 04a Morbid Puppets
- LD 04b Melmoth
- LD 04c Morbid Puppets
- LD 04d Morbid Puppets
- LD 05 Alderan's Vault
- LD 06 S'Erum, ophidian sydion



During the **mana recovery phase** the Lord of Insanity recovers seven gems of Fire and three of Darkness. The Seal of Phobos recovers eight gems of Air.

WILLEM: "This round doesn't bode well, for Nicolas has begun dividing his Units after the movement of my cavalry. If he continues on like this, then my strategy, which consists of pushing the front as far as possible from the fort, will unravel..."

NICOLAS: "The trap is falling into place and soon the Cynwälls will be in a dead end. My strategy of division nevertheless carries a true risk: the Acheronians are bad commanders and the increase in Units causes an increase in my opponent's refusals. I must immediately make the most of my manoeuvres, or else I may end up paying a heavy price.

The Lord of Insanity got great results on his mana recovery rolls. Soon hellfire will engulf the Gorge of the Dragon in flames."



STRATEGY THE GORGE OF THE DRAGON

ROUND 3



THE SERVANTS OF THE ECHYRION

- AL 01a Cynwäll Asadars
- AL 01b Syd de Kaiber
- AL 02 First Selsým Brotherhood
- AL 03a Cynwäll Selsýms
- AL 03b Cynwäll Selsýms
- AL 04a The Masters of Time
- AL 04b Nelphaëll
- AL 05 Imperial Battery
- AL 06 The Falconer of Kaiber
- AL 07a The Judges of the Griffin
- AL 07b The Judges of the Griffin



THE ARMY OF THE INSANE

- LD 01a The Insane Scavengers
- LD 01b The Scavengers of Acheron
- LD 02 The Sons of the Pale One
- LD 03 The Immortal Horde
- LD 04b Melmoth
- LD 04c Morbid Puppets
- LD 04d Morbid Puppets
- LD 05a Morbid Puppets
- LD 05b Morbid Puppets led by Alderan
- LD 06 S'Erum, ophidian sydion



Before proceeding with the Tactical roll, Nicolas announces that S'Erum will be using I8. Willem gets the lead thanks to a final result of 10 on the Tactical roll.

WILLEM: "I took advantage of Syd de Kaiber's thrust movement to bring him within reach of the Lord of Insanity, who I hope to be able to block. Nicolas has announced that S'Erum will be using I8, which means that he won't move: Nelphaëll will calmly be able to charge the sydion. While the Hero

of Kaiber is busy with the enemy Commander-in-Chief, I'll try to destroy the first idol of nightmares with the Second Selsým Brotherhood! As for the thallion judges, they are within range to destroy the second nexus. With a bit of luck on my Damage rolls, things should go well..."

NICOLAS: "The trial isn't over yet: the minefield and then the fortifications still have to be crossed. Unless there are any unexpected events, it's only a question of time, yet there isn't much time left..."

During the **first firing and incantation phase** the imperial battery fires at S'Erum. Once again the sydion is missed by the terrifying black powder!

WILLEM: "Damn! I wanted to fire before Nelphaëll's combat is resolved..."

During the **movement phase** several important events happen. The Alliance of Light's Commander-in-Chief charges the Lord of Insanity, while Nelphaëll charges S'Erum. The thallions gallop off with





their mounts, chased by Melmoth! On the other side of the battlefield the selsýms persevere against the nexus. In the meantime the morbid puppets continue marching on the Alliance of Light's fort..

NICOLAS: "The Lord of Insanity versus Syd de Kaiber! Nelphaëll versus S'Erum! What a cast! I can't wait to fight."

The **second firing and incantation phase** begins with the pyrotechnics of the Lord of Insanity, who turns seven gems of Fire into a carpet of flames aimed at the First Selsým Brotherhood.

Four of these soldiers of Light are killed. Intrepid, the necromancer then shoots a fireball at Syd de Kaiber even though they are in base-to-base contact with each other! He risks hurting himself and, worse yet, damaging the nexus.

The elven Commander-in-Chief is unscathed, as is the magician, yet the nexus loses one Structure Point.

NICOLAS: "That was a huge risk, yet the various options I would have then had were tempting. Tough luck."

The **Masters of Time** (AL 04) fire at **Alderan's Vault** (LD 05), yet don't cause any casualties.

Seven combats take place during the **hand-to-hand combat phase**:

1) and 2) **S'Erum** versus **Nelphaëll**. **Syd de Kaiber** versus **the Lord of Insanity**: The exchanges of blows don't cause any Wounds.

WILLEM: "That's not very glorious..."

3) The **Judges of the Griffin** (AL 07a) versus **morbid puppets** (LD 04c): The two thallion judges who remained in the rear are annihilated by the morbid puppets, who only suffer one loss.

4) The **Judges of the Griffin** (AL 07b) make the idol of nightmares (A) lose one Structure Point.

WILLEM: "I have the feeling that this will take too long..."

5) The **Sons of the Pale One** (LD 02) and the **Scavengers of Acheron** (LD 01b) kill seven of the warriors of the **First Selsým Brotherhood** (AL 02).

WILLEM: "Ouch!"

NICOLAS: "That's a result that might seem impressive, yet which isn't surprising seeing the value of the troops involved. I would have preferred that my fast-moving troops had been free to attack the fort and that the selsýms had been bogged down in a fight against a slower and cheaper Unit such as Melmoth's Vault."

THE RED DRAGON'S OPINION

The risk was all too real: by wanting to finish the selsýms off quickly in order to free up his two fast-moving Units, Nicolas has ended up being bogged down in a combat that, though it's won in advance, slows him down dangerously.





WILLEM: "My objectives are the same as in the previous round: to get rid of the Lord of Insanity and S'Erum, and to bog down as many enemy Units as possible with my other Units. I will try to use the thallions' mobility to slay the Master of Acheron, for Syd de Kaiber won't be able to do it on his own."

Before proceeding with the Tactical roll, Nicolas spends three gems of Darkness on a dark stranglehold. Willem wins the Tactical roll.

During the **first firing and incantation phase** the Lord of Insanity uses Elemental Conversion to get six gems of Fire. He then starts casting spells: a carpet of flames engulfs the Hero of Kaiber. Syd loses one Wound level and two selsÿms are burned alive on the battlefield. The inferno damages a nexus, which loses one Structure Point.

NICOLAS: "An idol of nightmares has six Structure Points. I took a calculated risk and, alas, the probabilities were against me. Let's hope that I won't end up regretting it."

Three thallion riders carry out a "Move and fire" Order. They shoot at the **Lord of Insanity**, yet only cause him one Wound.

A ritual is being prepared in the Unit of the **Masters of Time**.

The assault on the fort begins during the **movement phase**. The **morbid puppets** (LD 04d) move towards it and enter the minefield. Bones and clumps of dirt go flying in all direction. An acrid smoke covers the battlefield. After it has cleared, only one morbid puppet is left standing to face the enemy!

WILLEM: "Not bad those mines!"

NICOLAS: "The sacrifice of a legion of morbid puppets is nothing! This allowed me to open a safe passage towards the fort for my more valuable troops. It's too bad that there's a morbid puppet left, for he gives my opponent an additional refusal."

Then it's the **morbid puppets led by Alderan's** (LD 05b) turn to enter the minefield, where they suffer six losses.

THE SERVANTS OF THE ECHYRION

- AL 01a Cynwäll Asadar
- AL 01b Syd de Kaiber
- AL 02 First Selsÿm Brotherhood
- AL 03a Cynwäll Selsÿms
- AL 03b Cynwäll Selsÿms
- AL 04a The Masters of Time
- AL 04b Nelphaëll
- AL 05 Imperial Battery
+ the Falconer of Kaiber
- AL 07b The Judges of the Griffin

THE ARMY OF THE INSANE

- LD 01a The Insane Scavengers
- LD 01b The Scavengers of Acheron
- LD 02a Wolfen Zombies
- LD 02b Wolfen Zombies
- LD 03 The Immortal Horde
- LD 04b Melmoth
- LD 04c Morbid Puppets
- LD 04d Morbid Puppets
- LD 05a Morbid Puppets
- LD 05b Morbid Puppets led by Alderan
- LD 06 S'Erum, Ophidian Sydion



During the **second firing and incantation phase** the **Masters of Time's** ritual targets **Nelphaëll** and affects her RES. Willem sacrifices the synchronime's six gems and three others from Galhyan's reserve, to which five are added to improve the mastery. The Cynwäll magician succeeds the incantation.





SOLAR ARMY

Gems: 4  and 3 

Path: Solaris.

Difficulty: Special.

Area of effect: Special.

Range: 30 cm.

Duration: Until end of round.

Solar Army is a ritual that can only target friendly Cynwäll Units. Its difficulty is equal to the targeted Unit's domination factor (Minimum: 10). If the incantation is successful, then the player can increase the INI, the STR or the RES (at his choice) of the targeted Unit's fighters by 2 points. The given bonus is identical for all of the Unit's members, no matter their rank.

A successful incantation allows the council to immediately cast Solar Army onto another friendly Cynwäll Unit, if it is possible for it to do so (Maximum: 3 Units per council and per round).

THE RED DRAGON'S OPINION

If Willem had placed his Unit closer to his troops, then he surely would have been able to make better use of this ritual. A good deployment is halfway to victory...



WILLEM: "I hope that'll help me kill S'Erum."

The **Masters of Time** (AL 04a) open fire at the **morbid puppets led by Alderan** (LD 05b). The akhamiäls target Alderan, yet their shots aren't strong enough to harm him.

NICOLAS: "Alderan (RES 10; Hard boiled) has exceptional stamina for a Character worth 89 A.P., especially if he also has Regeneration/5."

The **Imperial Battery** (AL 05) opens fire at S'Erum, yet the cannonballs stray onto the battlefield.

During the **hand-to-hand combat phase** five frays are fought between Willem's and Nicolas's armies:

- 1) **S'Erum** and **Nelphaëll** confront each other in a deadly dance. Unfortunately their exchanges of blows don't cause any Wounds! The fighters face each other, looking for the weak spot in each other's defences.
- 2) The confrontation between the **Cynwäll asadars** (AL 01a), the **Immortal Horde** (LD 03) and the **morbid puppets led by Alderan** (LD 05b) is described in detail on page 40.
- 3) The **Scavengers of Acheron** (LD 01b) and the **Wolfen zombies** (LD 02a) seek to overrun the warriors of the **First Selsým Brotherhood** (AL 02). The scavengers of Acheron and the Wolfen zombies kill four Cynwäll selsýms after a violent exchange of blows.
- 4) **Syd de Kaïber** supports the **Lord of Insanity's** empty gaze. While he is being sucked up by the Darkness that haunts the Master of Obscurity's

soul, he is given a fatal blow. His body collapses and his blood mixes with the dirt trampled by the insane scavengers.

WILLEM: "A failed Initiative test and a failed Regeneration roll... I'm disappointed, so disappointed..."

- 5) The **First Selsým Brotherhood** (AL 02) hammers at the idol of nightmares: the brave Cynwäll selsýms strike with all their strength, yet they don't even manage to chip the dark nexus.

During the **mana recovery phase** the Lord of Insanity recovers eight mana gems. Galhyan recovers one gem and the synchronime recovers four.

WILLEM: "I have lost my Commander-in-Chief in this round. Concerning chain of command, this is not dramatic. Yet it's annoying when it comes to reaching my objectives. Nicolas has free reign on this part of the battlefield and can devote his forces to taking over the fort. The next round will be decisive."

NICOLAS: "Syd's elimination is only the beginning. The Acheronians have been seriously delayed due to the unfavourable circumstances. This battle's outcome will surely depend on what happens in the next round."

ROUND 6

During the **first firing and incantation phase** the Lord of Insanity begins an incantatory chant. Though Nicolas rolled 7d6, he didn't get a single  required to succeed the incantation..

NICOLAS: "I have often been told that I need to be exorcised, and I'm going to start believing it."

The Imperial Battery opens fire at the idol of nightmares

Aldenys the Silent's shot gets lost in the air and is covered by the roar of the culverins. Willem therefore still has a good chance to succeed...

The result of the Damage roll is a !

WILLEM: "Good grief! Even though I would have stolen victory, had I succeeded, I really didn't have any luck here."

At the beginning of the **movement phase** Willem concedes victory to Nicolas.

WILLEM: "There's no use in playing this round. Aldenys won't die and the fort's size doesn't allow it to be decisively surrounded. It is therefore still possible for the game to end in a draw. However, we have considered it to be unrealistic that Galhyan and the Falconer of Kaiber save a desperate situation. I therefore concede victory to Nicolas."

OBJECTIVES REACHED

The Army of the Insane:

- Syd de Kaiber killed: one point
 - Two culverins destroyed: two points
- Total: three Victory Points.

The Servants of the Echyron:

- S'Erum killed: one point
 - One idol of nightmares destroyed: one point
- Total: two Victory Points.

Victory goes to the Limbo of Acheron!

WILLEM: "Defeat! My plan was too audacious. I should have sent Galhyan with the akhamiäls to give support to my other Units and be able to divide my army with Cynwäls on one side and Allies on the other. The thallions would have been able to ensure the fort's defence.

Concerning the Griffin culverins, I think that one culverin and one veuglaire are needed to be able to eliminate all threats. Also, without an artillery officer the Unit can't be used to its full potential. I'm glad about the stroke of luck I had with Nelphaëll and the elimination of S'Erum. Without that, the battle would have been a true disaster. And finally, the thallion riders really are very efficient. They are very mobile and can shoot at short range in each round before the movements are resolved! All that's missing is a mounted faithful..."

NICOLAS: "Around the fort the situation looks more like a game of *Confrontation* than one of

Rag'Narok! My victory has an epic flavour, with dramatic turns of events and reversals of fortune.

Strategy played an important part during movements. In media res did disservice to the Cynwäls, who lost a part of their mobility.

This game shows the necessity of having a strong chain of command in an Acheron army. The Lord of Insanity is an excellent magician and a reliable commander, yet none of the decisive manoeuvres would have been possible without the presence of the quæstors with Orbs of Obscurity and of the Crâne warriors."

THE RED DRAGON'S OPINION

It is a custom to say that half of the battle is decided at deployment. In this specific case it rather seems that it was decided in the first round. Though the "In media res" rule, which forced Willem to deploy his troops within at least 20 cm of the fort, didn't leave him many possibilities, he could have used a more defensive strategy. Instead of advancing his two infantry Units in the enemy's direction, he could have had them move back right from the first round on to force Nicolas to advance towards his objective and... towards the muzzles of the cannons. By carefully calculating the trajectory of his artillery shots, Willem could have hoped to "perforate" the Living-dead foot soldiers and hit the nexuses at the same time. The thallions would then have had all the time to do what they do best: hunt down the enemy Characters without having to worry about the nexuses, which are too resilient for their shots.



STRATEGY THE GORGE OF THE DRAGON

HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT!

The Noble Scourges (AL 01) are confronting the Immortal Horde (LD 03) and Alderan's Vault (LD 05).

ROUND 1

Willem's fray splitting gives rise to three combats.

a) Syd de Kaïber versus a zombie warrior. The Hero of Kaïber, true to his legendary celerity, has no trouble taking the upper hand: he strikes first and inflicts the zombie warrior with two Wounds, which deprive him of an attack. At the end of the fray this Living-dead fighter regenerates his wounds and therefore isn't removed from the game.

SEQUENCE AND NON-CHARACTERS

Non-Character fighters who have this ability are able to use an additional combat die in hand-to-hand combat by sacrificing ATT and DEF points in the same way that a Character can. However, they cannot acquire more than one additional combat die per hand-to-hand combat phase in this way.

b) Seven Cynwäll asadars versus eight zombie warriors. The elves get the initiative. Willem announces that he's placing this Elite's Concentration/X points in ATT and then that these troops are using Sequence. Thus the use of this ability doesn't reduce their ATT.

The asadars are highly trained in the subtle art of Feint: they can therefore use their successful Attacks to cancel out one enemy combat die! Willem decides that his elves will use eight of their 12 successes to cancel out the zombies' actions.

THE RED DRAGON'S OPINION

Willem has made a very strange decision in the face of such slow opponents who are bad in Defence. In such a case, using Feint is useless. At the most Willem should have cancelled out the enemy attacks so as not to expose his Elite fighters. He should have kept the benefit of nine attacks, which Nicolas's Living-dead fighters would have had a hard time parrying.

In short, cancelling out enemy defences by using Feint ends up giving the opponent one success for each one. This choice should only be made if, for example, the opponent is able to counter-attack or to allow a different fighter to strike later on without the enemy being able defend himself.



BEGINNING
ROUND 1



END
ROUND 1



c) Three morbid puppets versus three Cynwäll asadars. The latter have used up all their combat dice in the previous encounter. As a consequence only the morbid puppets strike blows: not a single Wound!

During the thrust movement Willem attempts to overwhelm the zombie warriors so as to allow Syd de Kaïber and several asadars to get near the nexus.



ROUND 2

The combat isn't going in Willem's favour. The morbid puppets and the zombie warriors are being helped by the Lord of Insanity. Thanks to a fireball, the Master of Acheron reduces two fighters of the Cynwäll Elite to ashes.

Willem still has the tactical advantage and therefore decides to split the fray into three combats.

a) Syd de Kaïber versus one zombie warrior.

	ATTACK	DEFENCE
LIGHT	1	1
ACHERON	1	0

	ATTACK DIFFICULTY	ATT. THAT STRIKE/ ATT. ANNOUNCED
LIGHT	0	2/2
	DAMAGE	WOUNDS
LIGHT	2	2

This time no Living-dead fighters regenerate their Wounds.

b) Nine Cynwäll asadars versus nine zombie warriors. The elves don't have the initiative.

	ATTACK	DEFENCE
ACHERON	9	0
LIGHT	9	9

	ATTACK DIFFICULTY	ATT. THAT STRIKE/ ATT. ANNOUNCED
ACHERON	9	9
	DEFENCE DIFFICULTY	ATT. BLOCKED/DEF. ANNOUNCED
LIGHT	5	4/9
	DAMAGE	WOUNDS
ACHERON	3	2

NICOLAS: "There is always the risk of getting a .

	ATTACK DIFFICULTY	ATT. THAT STRIKE/ ATT. ANNOUNCED
LIGHT	0	8/9
	DAMAGE	WOUNDS
LIGHT	8	5

The Cynwäll asadars' attack only causes three losses among the zombie warriors, for two of them regenerate their Wounds.

c) Five morbid puppets versus six Cynwäll asadars. Like in the previous round, the elves have used their combat potential against the zombie warriors. They therefore don't have any combat dice.

The Living-dead fighters don't succeed any of their attacks!

WILLEM: "Whew! That won't last forever..."

Because Syd de Kaïber no longer has an opponent, Willem decides to take advantage of his thrust movement to bring him into charging range of the Lord of Insanity. He hopes to engage him in the next round and thus reduce his magic activity. Syd de Kaïber separates himself from his asadar brothers-in-arms. This is a Unit division during a thrust movement: this manoeuvre requires a Discipline test (difficulty 7), which is brilliantly passed by the Alliance of Light's Unit.



ROUND 3

Willem has the lead. He decides to split the fray into two combats:

a) Seven zombie warriors versus eight Cynwäll asadars. The Living-dead once again get the initiative.

The elves are on the defensive. They majestically parry the zombies' attacks and send one of them back to the grave.

b) Six morbid puppets versus three Cynwäll asadars.

	ATTACK	DEFENCE
ACHERON	7	0
LIGHT	0	2

	ATTACK DIFFICULTY	ATT. THAT STRIKE/ ATT. ANNOUNCED
ACHERON	4	6/6
	DEFENCE DIFFICULTY	ATT. BLOCKED/ DEF. ANNOUNCED
LIGHT	4	2/2
	DAMAGE	WOUNDS
ACHERON	4	2

The asadars cut down the zombies, who get up again, and the puppets kill several victims on the sly.

NICOLAS: "Now that's a trap that the Cynwälls won't be able to get out of before the end of the game."



ROUND 4

In this round the fray is split into two combats by Willem.

a) Five Cynwäll asadars versus seven zombie warriors. A huge effort in concentration lets the Cynwäll asadars win the initiative.

	ATTACK	DEFENCE
LIGHT	10	0
ACHERON	7	0

	ATTACK DIFFICULTY	ATT. THAT STRIKE/ ATT. ANNOUNCED
LIGHT	0	9/10
	DAMAGE	WOUNDS
LIGHT	1	1

Eight attack successes are sacrificed to cancel out eight of the zombie warriors' combat dice. The one among them that is hit by the Cynwäll asadars regenerates his Wounds.

b) One Cynwäll asadar versus four morbid puppets. The elf no longer has any dice. Willem decides to sacrifice his two attack successes to reduce the morbid puppets' combat potential.

WILLEM: "Now that I think about it, I should have decided to try to kill two of them, for this would have reduced the enemy's combat potential by two dice and I wouldn't have had to get rid of two additional opponents in the following round..."

The morbid puppets go berserk. Only one Damage roll is successful and causes two Wounds on its own. A single roll can kill only one victim. However, because the victim is inflicted with more Wounds than he can endure, the morbid puppet gets a devastating attack, which he... fails!

NICOLAS: "A [die icon], always those darn [die icon]!"



ROUND 5

Willem, who again has the lead, splits the fray in two.

a) Five Cynwäll asadars versus seven zombie warriors.

	ATTACK	DEFENCE
LIGHT	10	0
ACHERON	7	0

	ATTACK DIFFICULTY	ATT. THAT STRIKE/ ATT. ANNOUNCED
LIGHT	0	7/10
	DAMAGE	WOUNDS
LIGHT	7	0

WILLEM: "I tried to see the result of a normal attack in order to evaluate the potential of my Elite. I think that this'll cost me dearly."

	ATTACK DIFFICULTY	ATT. THAT STRIKE/ ATT. ANNOUNCED
ACHERON	0	7/7
	DAMAGE	WOUNDS
ACHERON	7	2

Two Cynwäll asadars are killed by the zombie warriors' blows.

b) Five morbid puppets versus five Cynwäll asadars.

The elves no longer have any dice.

	ATTACK	DEFENCE
ACHERON	5	0

	ATTACK DIFFICULTY	ATT. THAT STRIKE/ ATT. ANNOUNCED
ACHERON	0	2/5
	DAMAGE	WOUNDS
ACHERON	2	0

We end the detailed description of this fray at the end of the fifth round since its outcome doesn't affect the fate of the idol of nightmares standing nearby.



BEGINNING ROUND 5



WILLEM: "The Cynwäll asadars... Now that's a very powerful Elite that can take the impact of an opponent superior in numbers for five consecutive rounds. It's obvious that their chances of survival are slim, yet they are up to the task. On the other hand, it would have been wiser to engage the enemy with a run instead of a charge, for division and the control of the number of opponents have much more advantages than charge bonuses do. In any case the Cynwäll asadars' domination factor (12) wouldn't have been enough to inflict such a penalty on the Unit of zombie warriors (20)."

NICOLAS: "The combination of Sequence and Feint makes the asadars terrifying, yet at the price of 39 A.P. per fighter! Like all very powerful and expensive Elites, these miniatures must be sent to where their potential will be the most useful. If not, then they waste their time fighting against numerous and/or regenerating Units, as is the case here with the zombies who regenerate and the flood of morbid puppets."

END ROUND 5



“

From the dizzying heights of the Claw of Terror, Feyd Mantis was gazing down at the Gorge of the Dragon. He inhaled the fetid odours coming from the battlefield below. Here and there broken bones stuck out from the carnage where elven flesh mingled with the necrotic bodies of the now motionless undead.

Asura de Sarlath waited patiently for Feyd Mantis to congratulate him for having vanquished the heroes of the second battle of Kaïber.

“Our Houses have dealt a decisive blow to the Alliance of Light. The other Fathers will be proud of you.”

“All we did was serve Darkness.”

Feyd Mantis turned around to look at the Master of the House of Sarlath.

“Thanks to you, the Alliance of Light has engaged itself on the path of suffering.”

Asura smiled on hearing these words.

”





In the port of Kraken
there are goblins
who drink...

CAPTAIN KRILL

PORTRAIT

"A what?!"

"A biographer, Cap'n Krill. He says he wants to tell your adventures."

Slouching in the smokiest corner of the Three Gourds, one of the countless watering holes in the port of Cadwallon, Captain Krill wasn't in the mood for doing job interviews. In spite of it all, he made the effort to turn around to throw a glance at the small and chubby fellow waiting at the tavern's entrance, visibly not used to the virile atmosphere of this kind of place.

"Tell my adventures? To who?"

"Don't ask me, his children maybe, to put them to sleep..."

Krill shot a menacing glance at his first mate.

"Bring that fool over here instead of making smart remarks. And hurry up before he gets eaten alive, standing there looking like an egghead graduate from the N.B.A.*"

A moment later Dhypter was back accompanied by the small man who seemed more and more ill at ease. As he walked by, the motley crew of regulars ogled at him as if he were a roast coming out of an oven.

"So? What does four-eyes want from me?"

No one was quite as good as Captain Krill at making people feel at ease. The small man sputtered some incomprehensible excuses concerning his impertinent audacity before very quickly making a speech that he had surely learned by heart for the occasion.

"My name is Thelonius. Otto Thelonius. Writer and biographer, at your service. I have come especially from Akkylannie to gather the testimony of the great adventurers of our time. Your reputation places you at the top of my list, of course. That's why I'm honoured to ask you for a few hours of your precious time, to put down in writing the story of your exploits."

Out of breath, Thelonius interrupted his monologue while waiting for the captain's reaction.

Captain Krill now saw the man in a whole different light. A book about him. Those words echoed in his head and voluptuously stroked his overblown ego.

A few minutes later the clandestine gambling room installed in the tavern's basement was emptied of its patrons and Captain Krill settled in with Thelonius.

"So? Where do we start?" asked the captain, eagerly looking forward to singing his own praises.

"You can tell me how you became a pirate, for example," answered Thelonius.

"Ah, well..."

Captain Krill leaned back into his seat and began telling his story with all the haughtiness that only a bona fide teller of tall tales is able of conjuring.

"At the time I was serving Emperor Izothop. Well, I say 'serving,' yet being the Generalissimo-in-Chief of the imperial armies, I didn't take orders from anyone and especially not from a puppet emperor like that usurper Izothop! In short, I was the boss of the army and I can tell you that I didn't fear anyone! Believe me, under my orders everything went smoothly, and I won more victories than any other general, be he from Akkylannie or anywhere else. Have you ever heard of the Battle of the Beryn Hills?"

"Yes, of course," answered Thelonius. "That's where the Eleventh Legion of Akkylannie was decimated. That was during the Wars of the Levant, wasn't it? I thought that it had been slaughtered by the orc clans of northern Bran-Ô-Kor..."

"Orcs? And why not squirrels while you're at it?" the captain shouted. "By Rat's warts! It was me and my buddies who were there, not a gang of bawlers in fur loincloths! We gave those religious nuts the thrashing of their lives! I can tell you that on that day

their god really must have regretted being unique, seeing how many of them we sent him!"

"I see, captain... but let's get back to your... vocation as a pirate. How did this happen?"

"Will you give me a second, OK?! I'm getting there. Now... It seems that my popularity among the soldiers must have really begun to scare those wimps who were supposedly governing the empire. Izothop must have worried that I throw him off his throne with a few kicks in the rear end, so he made sure that I would never return from my next mission."

Krill paused for a moment before he continued with his story.

"We had organised a raid to subdue the Wolfen packs of the east of Diisha who had become a bit too unruly. I left with two divisions to scout the terrain. Four regiments were supposed to meet me there three days later, yet nothing went as planned. After two days all the packs in the area pounced on us, warned of our presence by who knows which miracle. We defended our camp with everything we had while hoping to hold out until reinforcements arrived. Obviously, they never showed up. They had never even left Klûne, as I learned later on. Most of my soldiers fell over there. Me, I managed to miraculously escape with some of my best men."

Captain Krill paused again, visibly shaken by the painful memories. It was Thelonius who pulled him from his sombre thoughts.

"What did you do then?"

"At first I wanted to return to Klûne and wring the neck of that stinking hyena Izothop. But I'm not crazy. I was well aware that all of the country's assassins were surely waiting for me to show my face over there. So I swallowed my anger. Well, I at least placed it in a corner to keep it for later. With my men we went to the only place where we were sure to go unnoticed: over here to Cadwallon. Luckily we still had our war plunder."

"What do you mean?"

"You can imagine that when one spends 15 years ransacking and pillaging towns and villages, one puts some of the booty aside for old age. In any case, it was enough to see us through. At the beginning we had a bit of a good time, but on the long run I began missing action. At first I had thought of founding a company of mercenaries, yet there was

already too much competition in the area. So I had another idea."

"Piracy?"

"No, knitting, you varmint! Obviously, piracy! With our loot I armed a vessel and hired a crew. Most of my men had remained with me. As for the others, I found more sailors over here than I needed."

"Did you know anything about sailing?" asked Thelonius.

"The principle is not to sail but to prevent the others from doing so," answered Krill with a loud guffaw. "And at doing that, I'm the best," he added with a fierce expression. "To date I have sent more than 150 old tubs to Davy Jones' locker. Either with or without their crew... I can't help it, I just ain't very patient. If anyone starts making a fuss, I just kill 'em all. If they're lucky, I only sell them as slaves. And when I say 'if they're lucky' it depends on who I sell them to. If they end up sold to those nutcases of the Scorpion, they usually miss the company of the barnacles."

Thelonius suddenly interrupted Captain Krill's story.

"Captain, there is a strange rumour going 'round about you. They say, as unbelievable as it may seem, that you are extremely scared of water. What's the truth on this?"

Thelonius had approached the subject jokingly, expecting his interviewee to take it with humour and detachment, two words that didn't exist in Captain Krill's colourful vocabulary. The latter squinted his right eye and stared at Thelonius with his jaws clenched. This was a characteristic tic of his, which his underlings knew well, and was the sign of an imminent and generous distribution of slaps and kicks in the butt. At that moment Thelonius realised that he had forgotten with whom he was talking. Cold sweat suddenly ran down his back and he worriedly awaited his interviewee's reaction.

Krill's jaws suddenly opened wide, flashing his fangs with a grin whose meaning could either be "good joke" or "I'm going to pull your guts out with my teeth."

The blacksmith's eyes popped wide open.

"A one and a half metre big fishhook? What in the world do you want to do with that?"

"It's for very fat bait," answered Mister Dhypter laconically.



* No-Dan-Kar Battle Academy.



ETH-ΔÿR, THE FOREST OF THE ANCIENTS

The north of Lanever is a vast wooded expanse that remains almost completely untouched to this day. Without being as dense, humid and sometimes dark as Quithayran, the forest of the Daikinees, this one remains an impenetrable heart that feeds countless legends in Lanever as well as elsewhere.

The forest of the ancients silently watches the Leāk'Shear and the Syrlinh converge in the Straits of Larōnn, while at its extremity the city of Cadwallon teems and prospers under the vigilant gaze of the Cynwälls. This port city has some land that the humans have claimed. Beyond this land stretch swamps, wetlands and mangroves.

Yet the deepest parts of *Oth-Aÿr* continue to shelter Cynwäll cities that are more discreet than elsewhere, hidden in the thick vegetation, far away from the eyes of any voyagers. These communities are not welcoming, jealously guard their territory, and cohabit warily with the forest's other inhabitants. Indeed, several clans of ogres have refused to move to Cadwallon and carry on their ancient traditions in these isolated corners. They live in autarky and stay away from the Cynwäll cities.

And finally, a Wolfen pack has settled *Oth-Aÿr* two centuries ago, gathered around a sanctuary of Yllia. The Howling Pack still lives within several days of Cadwallon, there where the foliage rarely lets the light of day come through. Surprisingly, these Wolfen have managed to earn, if not the friendship, at least the kindness of a small Cynwäll city in the vicinity called Llÿaran. In the past the Howling Pack has illustrated itself by fighting alongside the Cadwës against Akkyshan raids. Yet this time is over and the pack has now adopted the lifestyle of the city.

Some Cadwës wonder about the Cynwälls' discretion in this part of Lanever. They whisper that the forest of the ancients hides many secrets and that the elven cities are in reality inviolable sanctuaries.

THE LAIR OF THE DRAGONS

I CAN TRULY SAY THAT MY TRAVELS HAVE LED ME WHEREVER THE WINDS OF ΔARKLASH BLOW. DRESSED IN LIGHT OR SHROUDED IN SHADOWS, I HAVE VISITED EVERY CORNER OF LANEVER. I HAVE KNOWN THE MARVELS OF ITS CITIES, I HAVE FACED THE DANGERS OF ITS FIRES AND THE FLAMES OF ITS DRAGONS, AND I HAVE WONDERED AT THE WISDOM OF ITS TEMPLES.

REYSANDRE, WANDERING POET AND GEOGRAPHER.

As proof of this, Llÿaran holds the most famous *archrônîl* of Lanever. This term designates the equivalent of a temple for the synchronîmes. Here fundamental research is done in the science of these mysterious elves, who are said to be able to manipulate time...

CYN'SHEAR, THE SHORES OF EXILE

It's on these lands that Ehlan's followers once landed before founding their own nation, Lanever. These grassy, game-filled plains could have become a prosperous home for these elves in exile. Yet unfortunately this region located west of Lanever has been a favoured target of Acheronian attacks for a long time.

These moors, which are full of rocky outcrops, are dotted with Cynwäll defence posts where the

selsÿms keep watch. Yet the huge forests are favourable for life and hold several elven cities that have begun prospecting for minerals. The ground is indeed rich with minerals that are used to forge helianthic weapons. Once they have been extracted they are transported eastwards to Cyn'Wyde.

The biggest city opens up to the sea as if in defiance of the forces of Ashinân. Aneirin is protected by high walls and its harbour can be closed by two immense sliding doors made of wood from the Emerald Forest, strengthened by helianthic steel and enchanted by the city's heliasts. Aneirin's fleet is mainly military. It guards the coast of Cyn'Shear and is assisted by the dragon-knights who have a stronghold that is carved into a gigantic cliff located within several hours' march from the city. At night this fortress's lighted ledges make it seem like a wall of stone set with glowing jewels.



DARAKÿN, THE LAND OF THE DRAGONS

This region marks the border between Lanever and the Behemoth Mountains. In these mountains rises Laroq, the heart of Cynwäll power. This gloomy fortress is in effect where the Guide of Lanever resides and the seat of the Noesian council. Laroq is an older stronghold than Lanever. It was offered by the dragons when they became allied with the exiled elves. Since then, new towers have been built more in the Cynwäll architectural style. Yet Laroq nevertheless remains a rather unwelcoming place, just like the whole region around it. There are three Cynwäll mining towns in the Behemoth Mountains, which are closely guarded by the dragon-knights. There are also several isolated monasteries that take in equanimes who have decided to use their practice for the art of war or, more rarely, for meditation. These monasteries can, like Laroq, only be reached by riding on the back of a dragon and live cut off from the rest of Lanever.

Darakÿn is a land that's as cold as stone, very steep and battered by violent winds. At its heart an inviolable sanctuary lies hidden. This sanctuary, called the *anoï-drak*, is forbidden to all except the dragons. It is their ancestral cemetery, a place where even the Cynwälls are not welcome. The few legends that are told about them tell of a city with ivory towers, which are in reality bones, inside a gigantic rocky cirque. This ivory, which has been polished by the centuries, can blind whoever dares lay his eyes on the *anoï-drak*.

ALLYVIE, THE LUMINEUS VALLEY

This fertile, wooded and game-filled region is one of the most prosperous ones of Lanever. Far from the threats of Acheron and Ashinân, and open to the allies of the Kingdom of Alahan, Allyvie is a region where one often meets travellers from other countries. Ever since the founding of the Alliance of Light (see *Cry Havoc*, vol. 2) the borders of Allyvie have been open to the Barhans, who have established several villages there. At first the Cynwälls stoically accepted these installations, all the while making it clear to the authorities of Alahan that their borders hadn't suddenly disappeared.

Yet this "colonisation" isn't official at all and is carried out mainly by peasants whose lands were ravaged by the dark forces of Acheron. Unfortunately Allyvie has acquired a reputation of being a "gilded land" for many Barhan rejects, and sometimes even for Cadwës exiled from their city. Banditry and plundering have become a source of worry for the Cynwälls, who have deployed a great number of sentries in the area.

Three decades ago a Daikinee community settled in the thick forest that stretches to the north of Allyvie. Banished from Quithayran for unclear reasons, yet refusing to embrace the ways of Light, these elves are trying to carry on their traditions. Yet because they are far from their forest, they are struck by *maaliva* (abandonment by the fairies) and their life expectancy grows shorter every day.

CYN'WYDE, THE CRUCIBLE OF EXILE

According to Cynwäll tradition, when Elhan and Akaris arrived at the site of the future Wyde, Elhan cried tears of joy and of relief. He felt that the *cynwäll* of his people was reaching its end. Cynwäll children learn that those were the last tears ever shed in Lanever. Akaris looked at his pupil and announced that from his tears would spring a crystal that was purer than water, clearer than air and smoother than silk. This place would be the birthplace of the Cynwäll nation. These legendary words founded *Cyn'Wyde*, the most flourishing region of Lanever. Protected from the Akkyshans by the *Cyn'Shear* and from Acheron by the land of the dragons and the Behemoth Mountains, energised by the Kingdom of Alahan and by Allyvie, it is fully devoted to the Cynwälls' prosperity. Much exchange is done with the Barhans and even with the Sessairs. The port city of Fellÿance maintains many trade relations with other ports such as Cadwallon and Indattè.

Wyde is the crucible of Cynwäll wisdom where the famous Cynwäll university is established. No other city of Lanever can rival it in beauty and prestige. Wyde's architecture seems to be turned towards a single goal: the celebration of Light and of Clarity. Its highest towers pierce the clouds in search of sunlight; its luminous fountains pour their water into channels that flow along the sinuous streets. This network, which feeds colourful gardens in the heart of the city, evokes the Cynwälls' past and perfectly symbolises the exile of these elves who left the lush Quithayran behind to create a new forest of light.

Wyde is a beacon for the scholars of Aarklash, yet only some of them are invited to stay at its university ever since ancient manuscripts disappeared from the Ymsophia (see *The Legacy of the Ancients, Cry Havoc*, vol. 2).

The temple of Maelhÿnn is a true city within the city. Its towers take in wise men who come from other regions to learn the principles of Noesis. In its courtyards the children do their daily training in *tenras*, the art of the body and soul of which only the equanimes master all the marvels.

Yet Wyde is not alone.

Apart from Fellÿance, the region's other cities are turned towards commerce or the cultivation of the fertile land of *Cyn'Wyde*. The minerals brought in from *Cyn'Shear* are used in the heliasts' towers, which can be recognised due to their architecture combining stone, crystal and helianthic steel.

“

The Omÿnsill is the memory.

It is the tradition of Elhan, the one who has opened the way.

It is also the future, the reappearance of Light, of strength and of Truth.

The Guide does not rule. He is.

And that is sufficient, for the Light shines upon us.

”

EXILE

MANY SCHOLARS KNOW THAT THE HISTORY OF THE CYNWÄLL ELVES IS THAT OF THE EXILE OF A PRINCE AND HIS DAİKINEE MEN. THIS VISIONARY'S TEACHINGS SHAPED YOUNG PRINCE ELHAN'S MIND AND CAST THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE REPUBLIC OF LANEVER. IF THESE TWO BEINGS HAD NEVER MET, THE DAİKINEE PARIAHS WOULD NEVER HAVE DISCOVERED THE WAYS OF LIGHT.

A NEW DAWN

Akaris was waiting patiently in the antechamber. He didn't understand the menacing attitude of the fighters around him, but he guessed that it must have been their duty as members of King Seos's personal guard. After a while he was motioned to enter.

Alone before his monarch, Akaris bowed and saluted as was appropriate. Yet despite his irreproachable presentation, the king of the Daikinees seemed to be annoyed by the warrior's presence.

"Rise," said the king. Akaris stood up straight and took on a military posture. "The prince has informed me of a strange request. He wishes that I promote you to the rank of weapon master. Is that right?"

"It's not up to me to confirm the prince's desires, your Majesty."

"Indeed, yet I was hoping that you would be able to explain the reasons for his decision to me. You see, Elhan already has a weapon master who I can't dismiss without a reason."

"Maybe the prince isn't satisfied with his teachings. And I seem to have understood that his mastery of combat is not one of his prime qualities."

The king wrinkled his brows and his gaze became harder.

"I'm perfectly aware of my son's faults and qualities." Akaris thought it best not to say anything. "On the other hand, I have very little information about you. I can't entrust my son to a stranger."

"I don't have anything to hide."

"Yet you have a shady past. It is said that you stayed with the people of Kel for a long time."

"Indeed, I took part in their search for Eäkhyn."

"It's true that you have the luck of not aging."

"Just like your son, your Majesty."

"Just like one of them, indeed. Yet according to rumour you have also visited the Drune clan."

"I have fought them."

"I have been told that you have made pacts with them and that their wicked traditions have corrupted your soul."

"I have learned to know my enemy so as to be able to defeat him more easily."

This answer wasn't satisfactory. The king spent several moments scrutinising Akaris.

"I don't like you. You may be an excellent warrior and a defender of our people, I still don't like you. And I can't see one good reason to make a simple guard my son's weapon master."

"If I may..." With an annoyed gesture the king authorised Akaris to go on. "You don't have to like me, your Majesty. You simply have to be convinced that I would be a good weapon master for the prince."

"It's true that you also have the reputation of being a talented warrior. But the prince already has a weapon master."

"That one has failed. The prince still isn't a warrior."

The king stiffened, thus ordering Akaris to stop talking. Then he got up and stood face to face with the Daikinee warrior.

"And you, who I am told I should be wary of, you would turn my son, Elhan, into a strong and valiant elf?"

"I would make Elhan the best of all princes for the Daikinees."

FIRST LESSON

Akaris's breathing was steady. He felt at ease despite the heavy protection he was wearing. He slightly loosened his grip on the quarterstaff and attacked the prince. Elhan moved to parry, but couldn't avoid the blow. Yet he nevertheless resisted the impact and held strong on his two feet. Then he tightly gripped his quarterstaff and got ready to strike back.

Akaris smiled under his helmet. The prince was making progress. When the young heir attacked, Akaris simply dodged the blow without retaliating. He had to give the prince the opportunity to learn from his mistakes without battering him with blows.

The fighters were facing each other again, slowly turning in a circle in the middle of the royal weapon room. Akaris was teaching the prince an innovative

combat technique and no one was allowed to watch these sessions.

The Daikinee warrior patiently tested his student's nerves. He did one feint and false start after the other. After several minutes, not being able to hold out much longer, the prince made a final attack using all the strength he had left. Akaris quickly sidestepped him and made him fall.

The young elf remained lying on the floor for a moment. Then he got up, took off his helmet and swore.

"Master Akaris!"

"Yes, your Highness?"

"I've had enough, I'm not getting anywhere."

"Indeed."

Faced with this humiliating fact, the prince became red with anger.

"You don't have the right to make fun of me! You're my servant!"

"I beg for your forgiveness, prince."

Elhan calmed down. Then he threw away his quarterstaff.

"All this doesn't make any sense. I don't like fighting. I've had enough of this stupid training."

"What will your father say when he hears of your decision?"

"Since when do you worry about my father? I don't care what he thinks; I want to continue our discussions. That's why I asked for your promotion."

The young prince sat down on his helmet. Akaris got closer to him.

"I'm a warrior. I can only teach you the art of fighting."

"No, you're not just a warrior. You ask yourself questions like I do. That's why I had you brought into my service, to calm my worries and soothe my doubts. Not to teach me how to handle the quarterstaff."

"Yet these are all the same thing." Elhan raised his head and looked at his weapon master questioningly. "You feel doubt and fear. You are seeking answers. They are all in our combats."

"Decidedly I don't understand a thing."

"What were you thinking about during your last assault?"

"About beating you."
 "And when I attacked you a bit before that?"
 Elhan hesitated.
 "About nothing."
 "Or almost. That's why you managed to partially block my blow."
 "I don't..."
 "You had managed to distance yourself from the battle. You were lucid and master of yourself. So you were able to see my blow coming and parry it."
 "Or almost. But what does that have to do with the place of the elves in Creation?"
 "If you manage to find that calm outside of combat, you could be lucid at any occasion and when faced with any question."
 Elhan looked at Akaris with wonder. He got up again, his helmet under his arm.
 "I'm ready!"
 "No, we have fought enough for today." Akaris turned around and moved away while thinking. Then he turned again to face the prince. "Sit down on the floor and concentrate on finding the same feeling of lucidity that you felt during our fight."
 "Excuse me?"
 "Do as I say."
 Matching his words with his actions, Akaris sat down on the ground and closed his eyes. He was also trying to find the lucidity of combat. Faced with his master's silence, Elhan did the same.

POLITICAL STAKES

This time there were no guards in the antechamber. Akaris knew that this wasn't because of the late hour. He got ready for the worst and knocked on the door.
 "Come in," answered a weary voice.
 Akaris obeyed and found King Seos standing in front of his sanctuary's window. The sovereign was admiring the terrifying storm that was raging over Quithayran. He seemed to be drawing strength from the unchained elements, yet Akaris could see the signs of his old age.
 "I'm at your disposal, your Majesty."
 A bolt of lightning split the sky. Seos turned around to face the weapon master.
 "I'm dismissing you. You may return to your lands and get on with your occupations."
 Akaris was dumbstruck, yet didn't let it show.
 "May I know the reasons for this dismissal, your Majesty?"
 "I'm the king of Quithayran! I don't have to explain my decisions to my subjects!"
 "You should explain them to the prince."
 The monarch's features became tense. He approached Akaris with huge strides.
 "And I will tell him the truth. That you are corrupting his mind with those useless ethical questions. That you have abused of my trust and that you are destroying his chances of accessing the throne!"

The two elves stood facing each other with less than a metre between them.
 "I'm making Elhan the best of all princes for the Daikinees."
 "Oh, you think so? Well, you're wrong, Akaris. All they talk about in my court is your absurd training sessions and your esoteric discussion. They make fun of the prince's questions and they treat him like a fool. Or worse, like a pariah."
 "This doesn't make any sense."
 "That's not for you to judge!" Another lightning bolt tore through the sky. Seos still had enough strength left to remind Akaris who was king of the Daikinees. "Nature is our guide. The gods are our guides. Not the morals and philosophy of mortals that are in their image: fragile, inconsistent, and empty of all meaning. They break the bond that binds a Daikinee to his true nature, the bond that you are trying to destroy in my son."
 "I don't wish to destroy anything. If this bond exists, then I'm simply trying to make the prince aware of it and be able to look at it with lucidity."
 "You're nothing but a madman. You're not a weapon master, let alone a wise man. You're just a madman who has been led astray by the king of Dawn's quest and the Drones' evil magic."
 "That's not true. The facts show the validity of my teachings. The prince is changing; he's becoming a true warrior."
 "No! He's becoming mad, like you!"
 "What I'm teaching the prince isn't founded on a bunch of Kelt beliefs and superstitions. It's founded on a genuine experience, a sincere, efficient and daily practice."
 "Your words have no meaning."
 "Yet he, the young prince, understands."
 "No, it's over. I'm the king and I'm sending you far away from him."
 With a simple glance Seos dismissed Akaris and returned to the window, yet the weapon master didn't move.
 "I won't leave."
 "What?"
 Propelled by what was left of his natural strength, Seos rushed towards Akaris.
 "I won't leave," repeated Elhan's teacher.
 "You don't have a choice, Akaris, I'm the king of this land."
 "I'm its best warrior."
 "You're nothing but a braggart!"
 "And you, an old man."
 The weapon master stood facing his king. His last words had sounded like a warning.
 Seos was betrayed by his instinct; fear took hold of him and made him move back.
 "You wouldn't dare..."
 The king had moved back without really being aware of it, no doubt realising where this conflict could lead him. Weakened, he nearly tripped, yet

Akaris caught him with surprising kindness.
 "I would dare anything. I have spent much time among the people of Kel. I know that their arrival on Aarklash will plunge the continent into a conflict from which no people shall come unharmed."
 "I know very well how to guide my subjects!"
 The wind outside was so strong that it pushed the window open. The king had stood up straight, yet Akaris was well aware of his weakness.
 "Times have changed, your Majesty. Soon the Daikinees will have the responsibility of guiding the nations of Aarklash into battle. We are wise and we know how to observe the cycles of life, yet our traditions prevent us from being lucid." Seos's gaze became faded and thoughtful. Akaris carried on with a softer voice. "Your life and your reign are coming to an end. Don't prevent me from preparing Elhan for what awaits him."

LAST LESSON

Akaris was tired. All day long he had been fighting in the streets of Laureken in the name of his prince. That evening he felt the weight for the first time of *Serrelis* bearing down on his shoulders. Yet he knew that the problem could no longer wait.
 When he entered Elhan's sanctuary, his advisors stopped speaking right away. Despite Seos's death, Akaris's reputation still made the others look at him with distrust.
 King Elhan dismissed his suite with a weary gesture. Then he sat down at the war-staff's table and pushed the maps away with a deep sigh.
 "What is it, Akaris?"
 "Your Majesty, it is rather I who should be asking you that question."
 "Well then, ask it."
 "What is it, my king?"
 "Call me Elhan... and I don't know what you're alluding to."
 "I was at the front all day long, but I managed to remain lucid throughout the battle, even the war."
 "I'm happy to see that my master follows the teachings that he lavishes on me. Unfortunately, tonight I don't share your wisdom."
 "Let's just say that I don't understand the logic of your strategy, your Majesty."
 "That sometimes happens in the heart of the battle. Maybe you weren't as lucid as you would have hoped. And I have already told you not to call me like that."
 "Yet that is what you are: the king of the Daikinees."
 "Not as long as I haven't defeated my brother."
 "I don't think you will win *Serrelis*."
 "I beg your pardon?"
 Elhan had raised his head. Akaris held back a smile of satisfaction: he had pulled his student from his lethargy. Everything wasn't lost.

"There's no use in unsheathing one's sword if one isn't ready to kill."

"I know, but I don't see what that has to do with Serrelis."

"You don't want to win this war. You don't even want to wage it."

"It's true that I didn't wish for it. Diplomacy should have been able to resolve this conflict if some hadn't insisted on treating me as a madman."

"I don't seem to have been clear enough: you don't want to accede the throne."

"And you had this revelation while you were busy slaughtering our brothers?"

"Yes. Your strategy isn't one of a commander who wishes to win the war."

"I thought that I shouldn't desire anything, that I should simply act."

"Yes, but not like a puppet. If you can't act with emotion, then you must act with sincerity."

Elhan didn't answer. The silence lasted more than a minute, but neither of the two elves moved by an inch.

"I don't want to win this war. I don't want to be king."

"Why not?"

"I don't want to cause the death of my brothers or even lead their lives."

"Your people needs you."

"No. That's not what you have taught me."

"So then what have you learned?"

"That I must remain lucid and honest with myself. Not that I had to serve my people."

"I taught you this knowing that you were the heir to the throne."

"You have shown me how to take the right decision, not the one that's expected of me."

"Very well. In that case, what do you want? Ever since I've known you, you have just refused and proclaimed the things that you didn't want."

"Yes, for my life is made of obligations. For years no one ever worried about what I wanted. Not even you."

Those words struck Akaris as hard as the most powerful blows of a quarterstaff.

"Now I am worrying about it. What is your desire?"

"Do you remember our very first training session? That lucidity that I felt at the moment you attacked me?"

"Of course, we haven't stopped seeking it for the past few years."

"I want to find that lucidity again, that calm in my mind, that soft warmth in my heart. That's all that is important to me. The border conflicts, the relations with the Fairies and the leadership of the kingdom are all subjects that are as meaningless to me as my preoccupations are to Silmaë."

"I don't know what to say, your Majesty. I only wished to make you the best of all kings for the Daikinees." Akaris also sat down. He let his weariness show on



his face. Elhan got up and placed his hand on the weapon master's shoulder.

"I know, but you only increased my desire to refuse this burden. I have been thinking about this for a long time. In a way I think that I knew, ever since our first lesson, that I didn't want to become the king of the Daikinees."

"So then why wage *Serrelis*?"

"Because those around me wish to see me sit on the throne. I don't have the courage to let them down."

"You have just let me down."

"And I'm sorry about that. Answering your questions made this avowal easier, as did our companionship. Yet things are much more complicated when facing my court."

"Have I thus been such a bad master?"

"Of course not," answered Elhan without showing any visible emotion. "You have changed my life."

"So then do me the pleasure of having the courage to shatter their hopes as you have shattered mine."

You owe me that, your Majesty."

Elhan's hand tightened its grip on Akaris's shoulder.

"That is true. Tonight I will go see Silmaë and abdicate in his favour."

"And then?"

"I will leave to somewhere far from Laureken. I'll go meditate on nature and on my place on Aarklash. I'll find the lucidity of my first lesson again."

"So my teachings haven't been completely in vain..."

"Certainly not. Actually, I'd like you to come with me."

Akaris stood up. He looked Elhan straight in the eyes.

"I am only your guide. I can show you the way, yet I cannot make the journey in your place."

"Very well. I will leave alone."

THE EXILES

The stranger had been waiting by the gates of Laureken for a long time. Lahn was just barely starting to let his rays fall upon Aarklash, yet the Daikinee had already had a long day. He hadn't slept all night.

He couldn't afford to fail. Soon the prince would attempt to leave the capital of Quithayran. After that it would too late to follow him. Apart from this terrifying thought, the stranger worried about all the figures that were gathering in the neighbouring streets. The rumour had visibly already spread in the elven city: Elhan had abdicated in Silmaë's favour. He was evidently not the only one waiting for the prince. Why? Now his death would bring nothing more to his assassin than the shame of a whole people. Not sure about what was going on, the stranger held his walking staff tightly and readjusted the hood of his cloak to fully hide his face.

At the same time another figure moved towards the gates. Immediately recognising Elhan's stride, the stranger was the first to react. Yet he didn't dare go to meet the prince and simply got ready to follow him into the deepest parts of Quithayran.

The Daikinees gathered at the gates didn't have the same intentions. Many of them were walking toward the prince, who instinctively placed his hand on the hilt of his sword. Those rushing toward him were the palace servants and the kin of the royal family. The stranger remained hidden in the shadows, ready to intervene. The prince had visibly also recognised those coming toward him.

"What do you want from me?"

"We have heard the news, your Highness."

"Don't call me thus, especially if you have heard the news."

"So it's true? You have been vanquished?"

"If that were the case, then I wouldn't be here but sitting in a cell. I have decided to leave."

The stranger noticed that all of the elves who were in the square were listening to the conversation. On hearing those last words, many of them shook their heads in disbelief. The prince's questioner remained speechless. A different, younger one then spoke.

"I want to go with you, my prince!"

"I am no longer your prince... and I'm leaving alone."

"But I can't stand staying over here!"

"Why not?"

"I have pledged allegiance to you and I have fought for you. It's been so many years that I've been looking forward to your accession to the throne that I wouldn't be able to bear seeing someone else do so!"

"Me, I can bear it. So, if you really pledged allegiance to me, then so will you. And you won't come with me. I'm going far away from here, far

from Laureken and our forest. You wouldn't be able to survive there." The young elf was demoralised. Elhan's voice was soft, yet his words remained stern. "My exile may cost me my life. That's a risk that I cannot make any other elf take."

On hearing those words a woman stepped forward.

"Me, I want to take it."

The weight of his decision and of the last night bore heavily on Elhan. His patience had already worn thin. He looked at the gathering before him and, to his regret, raised his voice so that all could hear him.

"I am no longer your prince. You owe obedience to King Silmaë. I'm leaving to a place far away from Quithayran to find something that is only of importance in my eyes. Go back to your lives and forget about me!"

The elf who had caused this declaration spoke again.

"I can forget you, but not the questions that haunt my nights."

The stranger and Elhan stiffened. The prince went to the elf who had said these words.

"Which questions?"

"Why have the humans come to Aarklash? What are they doing in the plains of Avagddu? Their presence scares me. I have the impression that our world is changing. I have been told that you ask yourself the same questions. And that's why you aren't continuing *Serrelis*."

Elhan remained petrified. The stranger could see doubt in his face. Finally, the elf formerly known as prince placed his hand on the woman's shoulder.

"What is your name?"

"Shaelynn."

"Shaelynn, are you willing to become a *cynwäll*?"

"If that is the price to pay to find the answers... yes."

"Then you can come with me."

Shaelynn smiled like a child. Encouraged by this success, other elves approached the prince. Among them the stranger recognised Erysio, a former advisor.

"Your Majesty, we also want to find answers."

Elhan turned around and looked at them with kindness.

"No, my old friend, you think that I'm leaving to organise a rebellion, but this is not so. Your place is over here with my brother."

"I just hope that your brother thinks the same. We have always given you our support and he surely still thinks of us as enemies, despite your departure. Staying here is too dangerous for us."

"No more than coming with me. At least you have good reasons to stay, whereas you don't have any to come with me."

Other Daikinees came forward.

"We want to follow you, prince, we have always preferred you to your brother!"

"You prefer me even though you don't know me. My brother will be a much better ruler. Stay here and be good Daikinees."

An old and lone elf took a step toward Elhan.

"I'm going with you. I have never been a good Daikinee and I won't be one after you're gone either. I prefer being a *cynwäll*."

Again Elhan hesitated.

"Then you can come with me."

After the old elf, many others came forward and spoke. And Elhan tested each one's reasons and convictions. He only allowed the pariahs like him to come along and rejected all political agitators and mindless worshippers.

At the end, all of the elves who had gathered there had submitted themselves to the *cynwäll* prince's sagacity. All except the stranger. Hidden in the shadows, he realised that the prince's departure was imminent. He could no longer content himself with simply following him. He had to join this brotherhood, now or never.

The stranger thought for a moment and then came forward.

"Elhan. I also wish to follow you."

The exile turned to face the stranger.

"Why, old elf?"

Akaris pushed back the hood that was hiding his face.

"Because I was already an exile before entering your service, Elhan."

TE WYDE

The wind was blowing so hard in the valley that the exiles couldn't even hear each other. They were advancing on a narrow ledge along a rocky cliff and continuously had to struggle against the gusts that threatened to push them into the void.

Elhan was leading the troop and Akaris was at its tail. Neither of the two was paying attention to the spectacle of nature around them: the valley was carpeted by a majestic forest and surrounded by peaks that were so impressive that no one could have doubted that they were created by the gods.

Akaris only thought of the stone beneath his feet and against his hands, and of the fear of falling. Yet he was surprised by the nature of this fear. As the weeks of exile went by, the idea of losing his life was replaced by a strange feeling. Now he worried more about the other exiles than about himself.

The fact that the elf in front of him stopped advancing brought Akaris back to reality. He lifted his head and saw Elhan at the other end of the Indian file, trying to speak to him. Yet the noise of the wind was drowning out all sounds. So Elhan showed Akaris a rope and pointed to the exile right behind him. Akaris then understood what Elhan had in mind.

At that moment a strong gust hit the exiles and caused Shaelynn to lose her balance and fall. The

Daiknees remained petrified, watching their companion who seemed to be floating in the air, her face frozen with fear.

Elhan's and Akaris's gazes met just when Shaelynn was carried off. Without thinking, Akaris held out his hand and, as if by reflex, Elhan threw him an end of the rope. While catching it, Akaris jumped off the ledge into the void.

Dumbstruck, the exiles scrambled to try to help Elhan while the weapon master flew like an arrow towards Shaelynn. The prince hoped that Akaris's greater weight would allow him to catch up with the young woman in mid-flight.

As for Akaris, he wasn't thinking about anything. He felt the rough texture of the rope in his left hand and the tension of his muscles in his right arm held out into the emptiness. The icy wind was whipping his cheeks and shaking the branches of the trees far below. A river twisted through the forest and ended its course in a loud waterfall. Birds were flying and singing everywhere. A few rocks that had been torn from the mountain by Shaelynn's fall were bouncing along the cliff as they fell. The young woman was screaming, but Akaris couldn't hear her. He simply noticed that the distance between them was quickly becoming smaller.

The weapon master felt a light touch when his fingers reached those of Shaelynn, whose hands were still delicate despite their exile. He energetically grabbed the hand she was holding out to him, yet without squeezing it too hard. At that moment the rope became taut and put an end to the fall of the two exiles.

Up on the ledge, Elhan was bracing himself as well as he could, the rope wrapped around his waist. Akaris and Shaelynn had risked their lives to follow him; he wouldn't let them die. Yet the two exiles were heavy.

Further below, Akaris was supporting all their weight with one arm. He became aware of the pain that was tearing his muscles and he concentrated to block it from his mind.

Suddenly he felt Shaelynn's hand slipping from his grasp. With a glance the weapon master understood what the young Daiknee was trying to do and quickly tightened his grip, refusing to let her go.

On the ledge the exiles were helping Elhan pull up their two companions. Slowly Akaris and Shaelynn were getting nearer to the troop. Akaris placed his feet on the face of the cliff and made Shaelynn do the same. This made it easier for them to be pulled up, and within a surprisingly short time they were back up on the ledge with their companions.

Elhan was glad to see his old master back in safety. Yet he noticed something new in his eyes. Without saying a word, Akaris took the rope and signalled all his companions to tie it around their waist. Never again would an exile fall alone.

BRETHERTHEED

It was early and a soft mist was still bathing the undulating prairies of the land of exile. From the path he was taking, Akaris could see the first equanimous brotherhood and the surrounding fields. On seeing these he tightened his arm around the parchments he was carrying and sped up his pace.



Elhan was sitting with his legs crossed at the top of the hill. His chest bare and a simple loincloth tied around his waist, he was meditating and tasting the pleasure of the morning freshness. He sensed his master approaching, yet preferred to ignore him and kept his eyes shut. Akaris was fazed by the silence yet pretended like nothing was wrong.

"Your meditation is far from perfect, Elhan."

"How do you know?"

"I have already told you that calm in action is better than calm in inaction. And you like this region too much."

Elhan opened his eyes.

"As much as you do, I believe."

"Indeed, it is promising but won't give anything if we don't make an effort."

"As far as I know, you are already making one. I imagine that those parchments are new plans for irrigation and construction."

"Yes, I want to get the most out of this crucible."

"This land provides enough food for all of us."

"Today, yes. But tomorrow it will have to feed our children and those who join us."

"Who would join us? Who are you talking about? My future subjects? These pariahs who will form a nation of exiles?"

The word "nation" was said with a hint of disgust in his voice.

"Why not?" Elhan remained silent. "Why don't you want to talk about it? I have noticed that the vision that I told you about when we arrived here doesn't please you. You have never approached the subject ever since that day."

"I don't want to come into conflict with you."

"Neither do I."

"So why do you insist on talking to me about this nation of exiles? You know very well that I don't want to be anybody's king!"

"The Truth must be spread."

"Why?"

"Others are looking for the same answers as you. They need you to be able to find them."

"Seeking the Truth is a personal quest."

Elhan's stubbornness had led Akaris into a dead end. He thought for a moment and then continued.

"Aarklash will soon be torn apart by a terrifying choice. The people around us will need our lucidity."

Elhan plunged his gaze into that of his master.

"Is it during your elevation that you realised this?"

"Yes."

"No, you're lying."

"I would never do such a thing."

"You have already done it."

Elhan got up.

"Be clearer."

"You're a warrior, Akaris, not a speaker. When we settled over here your speech was much too well put to have been spontaneous. I have asked myself for how long this idea of a nation has been growing in your mind."

"And?"

"And I made use of lucidity."

"Very well."

"You have known about it ever since we went into exile. That's why you came with me." Akaris didn't know what to say. "Your silence rings like an avowal."

The weapon master managed to pull himself together.

"Why did you wait until this morning to talk about this?"

"That's not important. Would my answer make you give me a new lesson? A new introspection of my pariah mind? I'm not sure I still want to listen to your teachings. Or rather, to your lies."

"I have never claimed to be telling you the truth; I simply said that I would be your guide."

Elhan was dumbstruck. Tears began welling up in his eyes, but he managed to hold them back.

"You could at least pretend to be sorry."

"Everything I do, I do it for your own good."

"Who are you lying to when you say that? To me or to yourself?" Akaris refrained from answering and let Elhan continue. "You didn't do anything for my good, but for your good, for your dream of an enlightened nation." Visibly emotional, the exiled prince forced himself to reach an end. "You're a liar. I don't ever want to see you again."

Akaris wanted to defend himself, yet he knew his student all too well. The lucidity that he had taught him was now being turned against him. He placed the parchments at Elhan's feet and calmly left. The former weapon master locked himself up in his apartment of the brotherhood. Very soon a rumour spread among the exiles: Akaris was writing a book about the Truth.

The master and the student didn't see each other again for decades...

THE END?

Akaris awoke with a start. He clumsily lit a candle and its light filled his room. Again someone knocked at his door.

"Come in."

Elhan opened the door but didn't enter. Akaris looked at him without saying a word. Then the exile decided to come in. He grabbed a stool and sat at the bedside of his old master.

"I have been told that you are very sick."

"Indeed."

"You are immortal like me. You can't be dying."

"I can have decided to be so."

"Why?"

"I have nothing left to do over here."

Elhan stared at his master.

"I heard that you are writing a book."

"I have finished."

Akaris waved his arm toward a tome lying on his desk. Elhan got up to take a look at the work. On its cover he could read *Teachings* by Akaris. Elhan opened the book and read its last pages.

"It isn't finished."

"Indeed."

"Then why die?"

"I can't write what follows."

Elhan closed the book again.

"Is that why you had me come here?"

"No, I wanted to see you one last time."

"Now that's a very shameful wish, my master."

"I'm confident enough of my lucidity to allow myself a few deviations."

Elhan turned to Akaris.

"Well, now you've seen me."

Akaris sighed.

"Are you still mad at me?"

"You know the answer."

"Now that's a very shameful rancour, my student."

"It's not rancour. My past experience has shown me that I can't trust you. I no longer wish to risk being deceived."

"Yet you came."

Elhan looked away. He clenched his fist and pressed it on the cover of the book.

"I have a question to ask you."

"I'm listening."

"What did you see among the Kelts of the Drune clan?"

"Why this question?"

"The people of Kel has divided again. Some among them have had a revelation. They say that a unique god will soon come to Aarklash to destroy us and build a new world. And though these mortals claim to serve the Principle of Clarity, I'm not convinced that they fight for the ideals of Light." Pain could be read on Akaris's face. "You knew that this would happen, didn't you? What did you see among the Drones?"

"I saw Darkness."

"Is Darkness Evil?"

"Not any more than Light is Good."

"What do these two things represent?"

"It's to answer this question that Aarklash will need the exiles."

Elhan's eyes were wet. He sat down again at his master's bedside.

"Why didn't you begin with this the day that you put a quarterstaff in my hands?"

"Would you have listened to me then?"

"Yes!"

"I wasn't sure about that. And I didn't know where I was heading myself. I was only sure that the Daikinees had a role to play in the coming conflict. I wanted to prepare you for that."

"By causing my exile?"

"No, the announcement of your abdication was a true defeat. I thought that everything had been lost."

"Why did you follow me?"

"I had given it much thought and I realised that I had to go all the way. If the Daikinees didn't want to listen to me, then maybe the exiles would. I don't regret my decision."

"You have manipulated me."

"I was hoping that by causing your elevation, I would rally you to my cause. I was caught at my own game."

"What do you mean?"

"It's you who made me reach the Truth." Dumbfounded, Elhan preferred not to interrupt his mentor. "All this time I believed that I was the master, whereas in reality I was the student. Teaching you lucidity forced me to search for it myself."

"You have elevated yourself, not I."

"You will elevate yourself very soon."

Akaris's gaze directed Elhan's attention to the tome. He looked at it for a moment and then turned back to his master.

"Your decision is irrevocable?"

"There is nothing left for me to do over here."

Elhan struggled against the sadness that was filling him.

"You were right. Darkness and Light are clashing on Aarklash. The peoples are tearing each other apart."

"I would rather have been wrong."

"I have at least one good piece of news to give you. You were also right about Wyde: the brotherhood has never stopped welcoming new arrivals of Daikinees. When added to the births, these arrivals have caused the emergence of other brotherhoods. Soon the exiles will form... a nation."

"Have you decided to become its head?"

"No, I will not be their king. I have spoken with Shaelynn. We will form a new kind of government. A government in which the obstinacy of a single individual cannot cause the separation of all. A government in which everyone has his word to say. I will only be their guide."

"Is that different from being their king?"

"I will show them the way, but I will not do their journey in their place."

On hearing these words, Akaris smiled. Elhan returned his smile. Then, satisfied, the old master let himself die.





NOESIS

HARD TO GRASP BY THE OTHER PEOPLES, ESPECIALLY SINCE IT IS NOT BOUND TO ANY GOD, NOESIS IS MUCH MORE THAN A RELIGION OR A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE. IT IS CENTRED JUST AS MUCH ON THE SPIRITUAL AS IT IS ON THE PHYSICAL, AND IS A PATH THAT LEADS TO THE ABSOLUTE UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD, TO THE TRUTH.

The following texts are extracts from *Travel Journals, Republic of Lanever* by professor Anathodle of the Royal University of Kallienne.

THE TWO FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF NOESIS

Noesis is the quest for the Truth. For those who go on this quest, it is not so much a question of sorting out the truth from what is false as it is one of understanding the universe, its ins and its outs, as well as the place of every individual in this whole.

Noesis is based on two great principles that I will attempt to explain to you further on: "Everything is one" and "Everything is illusion."

It's important to understand that even though all of them don't have as heightened a consciousness as the equanimes (the faithful who have decided to devote their lives to the penetration of the teachings of Noesis) or the Noesians (the individuals who have grasped the essence of Noesis), these two fun-

damental principles are an integral part of Cynwäll culture. Once they have been understood, the mysteries of this people reveal themselves like invisible ink to a candle's flame.

EVERYTHING IS ONE

According to the equanimes (and to the Noesians, yet they are far less talkative than the former), Noesis occupies itself with the "true nature" of things. One of its fundamental principles is to say that "everything is one" or, more simply, that "everything is linked."

There is a test that is very widespread among the Cynwälls, which consists of having someone draw a tree. Many people draw a trunk and the leaves or a trunk and branches without leaves. In either case the roots are missing so the tree is incomplete. It is true that one rarely sees the roots of a tree, yet they are an integral part of the tree as a whole. The way we picture the tree, and even the way we see it, is therefore just partial and doesn't represent the tree as it really is.

Better yet, if one draws its roots or if one pictures them, then the tree still isn't "viable." When removed from the ground, it is doomed to die, for it needs outside elements to survive; it is dependent on its environment. To make an exact representation of the tree, one must therefore show it with its environment. Its existence, its essence itself, is indissociable from it. From this is drawn one of the fundamental principles of Noesis: a thing does not truly exist outside of its environment or its context - everything is linked.

This principle explains many of the Cynwälls' traits of behaviour, especially their unflinching determination, their intransigence once their choice has been made, and their loyalty to their allies. This also explains why they appreciate lucidity so much. They give very much thought to their decisions, believing that a bad choice can have terrible consequences. This counts for their deeds as well as their words, and this in any occasion.

EVERYTHING IS ILLUSIEN

The second principle is also fairly hard to grasp for someone who hasn't lived among the Cynwälls. It says that everything one sees and feels is just an illusion of the mind.

From the point of view of Noesis, as I have explained earlier on, a tree is not a complete entity on its own; it is part of a whole, something bigger. A tree, as one imagines it to be, is therefore really an image of the mind, an illusion. This also applies for people.

Depending on the perspective one places oneself at, an individual has various faces. His mother has a certain image of him, his friends have another one, and his brothers and sisters yet another one, etc. And he has an image of himself that is different from all the others. All these images are incomplete and do not correspond to the Truth; they are therefore only illusions. For the equanimes it is the sum of these images that makes up the individual's Truth, but it cannot be seen in its whole, except maybe by some Noesians. (One must note in passing that they do not claim to know the truth about everything.)

A last point: this theory also applies to sensations and emotions. It is well known, for example, that our soldiers based at Kaiber feel cold less than those stationed in Cadwallon. And the latter suffer less discomfort caused by heat. Our medical and scientific knowledge allows us to say that the body adapts itself in relation to its environment. For the Cynwälls, who are surprisingly not fond of science, sensations are illusions. They don't deny their reality, but they believe that their variable character (in a given crowd there are always people who feel colder or warmer than the others) deprive them of "all credibility." I know that the way this is put may shock some of my colleagues, but it is sometimes difficult to transcribe with exactitude the meaning of the equanimes' words, and I insist on the fact that it happens that they speak of sensations and emotions as if they were living beings.

Their meditation techniques and the way they master their bodies allow the Cynwälls to go beyond these sensations or to only be sensitive to certain of them, depending on the situation. Some equanimes, and also some asadars, varsŷms and hunters (and, hence, Noesians), are also said to be able to reach other forms of perception than those we know (sensitivity to magic effects, detection of the invisible, night vision, sixth sense warning them of danger, perception of a prey's feelings, etc.). I wasn't able to verify these claims personally. Such feats could simply be side effects bound to their ability to concentrate. Indeed, we have known for a long time that magic, even when its effects are invisible, modifies the environment. Because of this it is possible to detect it (through the sense of smell, of sight, of hearing or a combination of the three).

Emotions are analysed in the same spectrum. Once again, we also know that there are days when we are more or less irritable and others when our well-being seems to be unshakeable. If, for us, this incertitude and this inconsistency are the things that make life beautiful, for the Cynwälls they are a gaping wound. They are the mark of their imperfection and of their vulnerability. Let us not be mistaken, the Cynwälls do not say "one must not have any emotions," but they rather say "emotions are variable, they make us weaker and alter our judgement, so we must not become their slaves."

From this principle comes the fact that the Cynwälls never judge people on the first impression that they have of them; they always try to understand each other's motivations and think for a long time before acting. In short, they step back to examine things. I may be repeating myself, but for them lucidity is the principal of qualities. It is this principle that has pushed them to develop meditation techniques that push back the body's limits.

And finally, it is also due to this that they rarely show their emotions. Not only because giving in to emotions prevents them from stepping back far enough to be able to take the right decisions, but also because showing one's emotions, especially when faced with a stranger, makes them vulnerable and gives a false image of oneself. Please note, nevertheless, that they rarely hold it against strangers when they show their feelings, even though they do like it when strangers adapt to their culture. Many doors were opened to me when I learned to wipe all signs of curiosity from my face.



THE TEACHINGS OF NOESIS

Noesis is an integral part of Cynwäll culture and is even its origin. All Cynwälls don't seek to become Noesians. Yet they all share a certain vision and the quest for Noesis, be it motivated or not and subconscious or not. They all learn certain aspects of it, beginning with the base, called the *foundation* (*ashandil*). Then comes the *girder* (*shatai*), the apprenticeship of the *shenras* and of meditation. Those who decide to devote their lives to the quest for Noesis become equanimes and must succeed their edification (*shanwë*), and then their elevation (*shamynwë*). Those who have reached this last stage are called Noesians.

There are Noesians who have never been equanimes, yet I will get back to these specific cases later on.

FOUNDATION/ASHANDIL

Strangers who visit Lanever are often surprised by the behaviour of Cynwäll children. I, myself, was troubled by the absence of crying, of shouts and of laughter. When my guide explained that even for a child it was incorrect to show intense emotions, I was shocked. How could one prohibit children from expressing their joys and their pains? What dreams could they have in a society where laughter, though not forbidden, is frowned upon?

It took me some time to understand, but now I know. The children don't suffer from any want, for they know the foundation of Noesis, meaning the world view that is bound to it. It isn't taught to them since it is an integral part of Cynwäll culture and is assimilated unconsciously. As a consequence it is as natural for the youngsters not to cry as it is to walk or to talk.

Among the teachings grouped together by foundation (these are not immutable; there are no books or methods, and to discover them the stranger must immerse himself fully in Cynwäll culture) there are:

- The mastery of emotions.
- The interdependence of individuals and of things.
- Lucidity is the prime quality. It consists mainly of stepping back, of thinking "coolheadedly" (and thus while separating oneself from one's emotions) and of thinking of the consequences.
- The notion of consequence. Every action causes a reaction, which isn't necessarily immediate or totally visible, but which exists. The youngest ones learn to carefully weigh their choices and to assume them, thus forging their determination and their strength of character.
- Death is only a break. Indeed, the word "death" doesn't exist in the Cynwäll language. They use the term *anoïkis*, which means the falling of the

leaves from the trees and can be translated as "rupture."

According to their beliefs, when they die, the mind fuses with Noesis and influences the evolution of the universe. The closer their existence was to Light, the stronger the influence. The closer the individual was to Noesis, the more his influence is conscious. Thus, and this is one of the many signs of the Cynwälls' openness, even the peoples who don't follow the paths of Noesis participate in its perpetuity. And there is a misinterpretation by strangers of Akaris's writings concerning the question of the rupture. Some have spread a "rumour" (let's just call it so) about the supposed immortality of certain Noesians. This is not true. Or let's rather say that this is not exactly true. For the Cynwälls, the concept of death is incomprehensible because no one ever really dies. There is simply a rupture in life. The Noesians "simply" keep a higher level of consciousness.

GIRDER/SHATAÏ

The girder is the most visible part of Noesis. It consists of the learning of the Cynwäll martial art, called *shenras*, and meditation techniques. This is done in the temples and monasteries among equanimous monks or Noesians.

Shenras was developed by the first equanimes. More than just a martial technique, it allows one to reach physical and mental harmony, especially through the symbiosis of body and mind. As you may know, the girder is not reserved to Cynwäll elves. All those who ask a monastery to be accepted can reach it. However, they must pass a series of trials designed to test their faith and their determination to follow the path of Light. Here again we see the Cynwälls' openness. Knowing the foundation is not a prerequisite for being accepted to learn the girder. Yet successfully finishing it is another problem...

The temples that teach the *shataï* are directed by Noesians. Most of them are located in the cities of Lanever and can accept several thousand students who sometimes train together in order to perfect their awareness that "everything is one." These temples also have places for meditation reserved to equanimes and Cynwälls who have finished their *shataï*.

There are other, more closed off temples. The monastery of Agentyll, which is located in the foothills of Laroq, gives privilege to meditation and is an almost obligatory place of passage for those who wish to become dragon-knights. Only the best students from the other temples are accepted. This is also true for the monastery of Lahn in the Behemoth Mountains. Known to welcome travellers and for being one of the most well suited for *shanwë* (see below), it also shelters students who are able to succeed their *shataï* and are destined to become equanimes, yet who wish to perfect their *shenras*.

The training lasts between six and 12 years depending on the individual and on the temple. At the end the candidates undergo new trials that, if they are passed, allow them to become true Cynwälls, citizens of Lanever, and thus to sit in an *ashendil*. These

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trials are particularly difficult for a stranger, for they require a good understanding of Noesis and especially a total adherence to it. Most of those who attempt to finish their *shataï* often do so solely to learn martial techniques. They are therefore far from understanding Noesis and its precepts, thus being prevented from learning the most complex techniques of *shenras*.

EDIFICATION/SHANWË

Edification is the first step that is "reserved" to those who have devoted their existence to the search for Noesis. Though it is open to all those who have passed their *shataï*, *shanwë* nevertheless requires more trials to be passed. According to the Cynwälls these are extremely simple. They require the candidate to have perfectly assimilated the foundation and the girder. It's a fact that, while failure is rare among Cynwäll elves, the strangers (who really are no longer strangers since they passed their *shataï*) have always failed! This proves that Cynwäll culture is hard to grasp, even for those who make a true effort.

Edification generally takes about 15 years. It is a period of learning and introspection destined for the development of personal techniques. Indeed, even though he is guided by a Noesian, an equanime must find Noesis on his own. After a year or two spent in a monastery reserved to equanimes and located in Lanever, the monks are free to choose their path. Most of them return to a temple where they spend

their time meditating and teaching *shataï*. Some choose to become dragon-knights to benefit from the wisdom of the huge reptiles. (This does not mean that only equanimes can become dragon-knights, but that it is easier for them; the dragons seem to get along "easily" with those seeking Noesis.) Others go to the monasteries of the Behemoth to perfect their mastery of the body before putting their will and their courage to test at Kaïber. One should note that a great majority of them spend at least a year in one of the monasteries in our kingdom (there is one at Icqor and another at Laverne) in order to open themselves to other cultures. And finally, some are chosen by the Noesians to become their disciples. I haven't managed to pierce the secrets that guide this choice. Are the "chosen ones" the most promising among them? To me this seems contradictory to the principle of *shanwë*. Yet they sit in the *allianwë*. The Cynwälls still have secrets, but I hope to uncover them one day.

All along his *shanwë*, an equanime must think about the *Teachings of Akaris* and finish them. Indeed, Akaris (by whom the path of Noesis was born) never finished his teachings. Noesians have avowed to me, without actually spelling it out, as usual, that Akaris had never wanted to finish them. *Shamynwë*, meaning elevation, the full understanding of Noesis, cannot be explained using words. Thus, the equanimes are to complete the text according to their own vision of Noesis, and it's only once this work has been done that they can reach the last step: elevation.



ELEVATION/SHAMYNWĒ

Thus, elevation is the “last step” on the path of Noesis. My quotation marks aren’t there for purely rhetorical reasons. It seems obvious to me that for the Noesians themselves their quest only ends with rupture. Elevation can be very short as it can be extremely long, ending only once the equanimes becomes a Noesian.

After having finished his version of the *Teachings of Akaris* and having given it to a Noesian who recognises it to be “true,” the Cynwäll is completely left to himself. The temple and monastery gates are then closed to him and he must never ask advice of a Noesian or of other equanimes. (To the question “What prevents him from doing so?” I simply answer “Noesis.”)

For some of them (who are extremely rare, it seems) elevation only lasts for a short moment, for they have become Noesians as soon as they finished their version of the *Teachings of Akaris*. They just have to become aware of it.

For others it can last up to their rupture. These often end up sinking into a state of languor. I have met several of them during my visits to Kaiber. Their gaze is dark and their heart is frozen. Their ferocity and determination are unequalled... They are thousands of leagues away from what one expects a Noesian to be like. Do they hope to find revelation at the heart of battle where the body and the mind join to only make one? Or is it rupture that they are seeking? I don’t have the answers, yet the question that obsesses me the most is how can the Noesians let equanimes who are so close to Noesis degenerate in such a way? This is one of the darkest parts of Cynwäll culture.

NOESIA

Noesia is the final state for those who seek Noesis. Only those who have elevated themselves can claim the title of Noesian. Respected by the whole Cynwäll people and also by the peoples of Light, the Noesians nevertheless only have a consultative role in the Republic. Yet one must admit that their opinion is never taken lightly. Thus, it’s the *allianwē* (a council formed by the Noesians, dragons and equanimes) that pushed the Cynwälls to go to war against Acheron.

The Noesians also take care of guiding the equanimes, of directing the monasteries and of various research projects, of which the least secret is in the field of the language of Noesis. Their goal is to find, and not to create (the Noesians are very clear on this point), a “perfect” language whose words express a true meaning. This would notably allow the last teachings of Noesis to be put down on paper and be revealed to all.

I will provide details on this research in a different volume of my journals written in collaboration with professor Sandromar. Indeed, some concepts by far overreach the limits of my expertise and require the help of a linguist for them to be explained.

THE PATHS OF THE OTHERS

Unlike what the previous texts may lead to believe, the equanimes are not the only ones to become Noesians and they are not the only ones seeking Noesis. In this case, why is the teaching of *shantaï* done by equanimes? This is essentially due to the fact that they perfectly master the bases of *shenras* and meditation techniques, but also to the mentality of the equanimes who, having devoted their lives to Noesis, often have a more objective view of *shataï*. Indeed, their path forces them to constantly question themselves through introspective meditation. Because of this they become more easily aware of what *shataï* has brought them and therefore transmit its teachings more easily.

Yet certain Cynwälls (especially heliasts) seem to be worried about the situation. Because the equanimes are the only ones to totally and “officially” follow the path of Noesis, their teachings tend to be seen more and more often as being dogmatic by strangers as well as young Cynwälls. Yet, by essence, Noesis cannot be dogmatic, and due to their diversity the equanimes cannot speak with a single voice (remember that each one must find his own path).

I will now analyse the other great paths of Noesis. For the sake of simplification I have associated them with different professions. Thank you for not generalising my remarks. Though the one I call the “path of the warrior” is essentially followed by fighters (*asadors*, *selsŷms*, *varsŷms*), other Cynwälls share these points of view, just as other warriors have differing points of view and follow other paths.

THE PATH OF THE WARRIOR

The equanimes all seek Noesis through the symbiosis between body and mind. Their techniques therefore combine meditation and *shenras* in equal proportions. This isn’t the case for “warriors.” Here is an example to show the difference. For equanimes it’s the harmony between body and mind which allows emotions to be hidden. These monks don’t only control themselves through a mental effort. Warriors, on the other hand, only use their mind to erase their emotions. The separation between body and mind is very marked for them. One could say that the equanimes are closer to the first principle (everything is one) and that the warriors are turned more toward the second one (everything is illusion).

This is explained in a simple way. The warriors’ job is to fight. Their body is their main tool, the shield between their mind and the enemy. Their mind must therefore put itself in the body’s service in order to be protected by it. I don’t write “in service” just for the form. The Cynwälls who follow this path believe that there is interdependence between the body and the mind.

The warriors use few meditative techniques and prefer trances that they can use in the middle of a battle. An *asadar* has explained to me that when he fights he doesn’t see through his own eyes but rather projects his mind above the scene to get a better view of it. This technique allows him to erase fear, forget pain and get a heightened awareness of the battle. This explains why Cynwäll warriors are among the rare fighters (with ours) who don’t fear revealing a weak point in their defence to force their opponents to also expose theirs, doing so at the risk of being dealt a fatal blow.

In addition to these trances, the warriors have had to develop many combat techniques adapted to sharp weapons and to armour. Based on *shenras*, these techniques are nevertheless very different from those used by the equanimes.

One can note that some equanimous warriors find their path by combining these techniques with those specific to equanimes. Once again, every Cynwäll is free to fulfil himself as he wishes.

THE PATH OF THE MAGICIAN

This path is followed by heliasts, synchronimes and helianthic craftsmen. Though it is mainly based on magic and technological artefacts bound to Light, the path of the magician, like the others, has many facets.

Those who follow it are the most pragmatic of Cynwälls. For them the body is a medium between the mind and its surroundings. Intelligence is what allows interaction between the two. The postulate of the path of magicians is as follows: even if everything is illusion, all Cynwälls (and not only they) agree on the fact that they have a physical body and a quality called “intelligence.” One must therefore use both these elements as well as the mind.

This path’s followers are more inclined to the mastery of the body than that of the mind (in the introspective and meditative sense given to it by the equanimes). They willingly use tools, rituals and artefacts. They seek Noesis in a more experimental than empirical manner, and in a way they are the scientists of the Cynwäll people. Their voice is growing stronger and stronger, for their qualities have proven to be decisive at Kaiber.



THE PATH OF THE HUNTER

The Cynwälls specialised in handling range weapons (such as azure hunters), and those whose profession is to hunt, give privilege to the mastery of the mind. Indeed, *shenras* is not of much use to them. They have therefore developed trance techniques that allow them to enter the mind of their prey in order to predict its movements and reactions. I was able to watch a training session of Cynwälls working on becoming azure hunters and I was marked by a speech held by their instructor: "You mustn't aim, you shouldn't feel the weapon in your hands. All that matters is the arrow. It is she that will strike the target. You must become this arrow if you wish to hit the target." No magic, therefore, but a strict application of the principles of Noesis: one must stand back and observe objectively from a distance; it's not the

marksman's weapon that counts, only the projectile. It is the object that hits or misses the target.

Some varsýms prefer following this path than that of the warrior. In fact, they are often straddled between the two. Their tracking methods are taken from the path of the hunter, yet their combat techniques are more those of the warriors.

THE PATH OF THE EXILE

The least known (and yet the most followed) of all paths is the one of the exile. As its name suggests, it is the first one opened up by the Cynwälls.

This path isn't bound to any particular techniques. Those who follow it know the teachings of *shatai*, but they don't use them for purposes of war. The exile's objective is above all communion: to help others without hindering them, to cope on one's own, and

to work for the collective good. *Shenras* allows them to keep their body healthy and meditation does the same for their mind. The exiles prefer to say that these techniques keep them in (or under) the Light, thus showing the bonds linking Noesis and the Principle of Clarity.

For the exiles Noesis lies in communion, in the symbiosis with others. This is surely why this path is the one known least by strangers. It is the path of common sense, the one of the people. In the end, the path of the exiles explains the Cynwälls' cohesion and strength. It's because this path exists that attacking a single Cynwäll means attacking them all.

LIGHT AND NÆSIS

Strangers who discover Cynwäll culture tend to place heliasts and equanimes back-to-back in order to rationalise the Light/Næsis duality. This isn't dumb, yet it is misleading. It's true that this duality exists, yet it is a complementary duality and not one of separation.

As I have already said, Cynwäll culture is based on two principles. If one studies their history a little, one sees that Næsis is the element that separated them from the Daikinees. Light, on the other hand, arrived later on. It is therefore tempting to believe that while seeking Næsis the Cynwälls turned to Light and its values. Yet this is not what happened.

The search for the truth is a value of Light, but the one for the truth (note the capital T) is a lot more neutral. According to the first principle of Næsis (everything is one), Darkness and Light are linked. In a world without Darkness one would no longer see Light, which would logically be everywhere and therefore be invisible. A heliast once told me of very rare yet notable cases of equanimes turning away from Light. According to him this deviance is not voluntary. It is caused by standing back so far that the subject places himself into a position close to that of the peoples of Destiny: the position of a neutral and non-interventionist observer. Some equanimes, exhausted and exasperated at not having found Næsis, are said to have sought it in Darkness alongside the Akkysians.

For a long time the Cynwäll people remained at the sidelines because of the preponderance of Næsis in its culture. Yet one shouldn't believe that Light and Næsis go against each other: the subtle differences between these two values explain the Cynwälls' complexity (between restraint and determination) and especially their unity: they are at once in the Light and under Næsis (or vice versa, I'm not a linguist).

A STRANGER'S THOUGHTS ON NOESIS

Annex to *The Republic of Lanever in Travel Journals*.

LIES IN THE QUEST FOR TRUTH

Unlike what one might think, the Cynwälls don't abhor lies as long as they are motivated by just reasons. They would rather lie than sacrifice innocent victims, for example.

What more, lying through omission is not considered to be dishonourable unless it is done for the wrong reasons. Of course one can ask oneself what the Cynwälls consider to be just or wrong reasons. When I asked this question, I was often answered with silence or sometimes with surprise. In reality the question seemed almost funny to those I asked. Once I was answered: "It is or it isn't just." Edifying, isn't it? Knowing if something is just or not is obvious for the Cynwälls, at least in most cases it is. If not, then justice decides.

ISN'T HIDING ONE'S EMOTIONS LIKE LYING ABOUT ONE'S INTENTIONS?

Indeed, in Barhan culture it is nobler not to hide one's emotions. When the men of Kel arrived on Arklash, one could even be condemned for not wanting to show them. The Cynwälls are not prone to duplicity and treachery. Therefore they are not hiding their emotions, but are rather controlling them. They don't lie about their feelings, but rather let out the surplus of them. Once again, to them the inconsistency of emotions is a mark of their weakness. They must contain them to avoid letting them influence their judgement and their attitude. They manage to do so thanks to their meditation techniques.

ISN'T WEARING A MASK CONTRARY TO NOESIS?

First of all, it's important to know that few equanimes wear masks. These are used more often by those who follow the path of magicians or that of hunters. In this case the masks are tools used more for their "technomagical" functionalities than to hide their emotions or impress the enemy.

Nevertheless, it's true that certain equanimes wear a mask. This is often a mark of dishonour, yet a chosen and assumed dishonour. No one forces an equanime to wear a mask! By hiding his face he admits that he must still learn to control his emotions through meditation.

MEDITATIVE RAGE

Many strangers are taken aback by the violence and cold-bloodedness that the Cynwälls are capable of on the battlefield, seeing in this a total contradiction to the meditative and open aspect of Noesis.

It's true that Noesis is an integral part of Cynwäll culture, yet Light is what holds this culture together. For a very long time the Cynwälls lived isolated from the other peoples. They could feel the rage of the Rag'narok coming... Now that they have decided to intervene, nothing can make them turn back. Their fury is level with the cancer of Darkness that's gnawing at Arklash, no more, no less.

NO GOD?

As you have understood, the Cynwälls don't worship any god. One can nevertheless affirm that they worship Noesis and Light, yet as principles and concepts. Even though some speak of Noesis as if it were a living being, they don't attribute any miracles or calamity to it.

The Cynwälls' position in relation to "foreign" religions is complex. There is no doubt that they tolerate them and very few of them would use rhetoric to make believers look bad. Yet it seems that they

aren't ready to tolerate just anything. When looking for traces of Daikinee beliefs in their culture, I have often sensed discomfort and even a certain annoyance in those I was speaking with (despite most of them being equanimes). I have the impression that as long as they are in Light, the peoples deserve their respect no matter what their beliefs may be, but if they distance themselves from it and this distancing is caused by lust for power, then they risk only being met with contempt. But that is just my impression...

THE DRAGONS' ROLE IN NOESIS

Even though I have never been able to verify it, the dragons (mostly) seem to be adepts of Noesis and no session of the *allianwë* (the council of Noesians) takes place without some of them being present. Going from there to claiming that Noesis is a philosophy that comes from the dragons themselves is surely slightly more than just a step... yet it is one that I will gladly take!



THE REPUBLIC OF LANEVER

I KNEW THAT THE TIME FOR RUPTURE WILL SOON BE COMING FOR ME. THE WISE MEN OF OUR NATION, THE NOESIANS, MUST COMPLETE THE TEACHINGS OF AKARIS, THE FIRST AMONG THEM. I DON'T CLAIM TO BE FOLLOWING IN THEIR FOOTSTEPS TODAY, YET I HAVE THE FEELING THAT WHAT I'M WRITING HERE IS THE END OF A JOURNEY. I CAN STILL REMEMBER THE LUMINOUS DAY 30 YEARS AGO THAT I RECEIVED AN INVITATION FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF WYDE. AND I ALSO REMEMBER THE DAY OF MY ARRIVAL IN THE FAMOUS CITY OF SAGES.

IT'S BEEN 30 YEARS THAT I HAVEN'T SEEN MY FAMILY. THIRTY YEARS SINCE I DECIDED TO DEVOTE MY LIFE TO THE KNOWLEDGE GATHERED HERE WHILE LEAVING MY KIN TO THE BENEVOLENT WILL OF MERIN.

The knowledge that I'm about to put down on paper is not very widespread. The Cynwälls are discreet and don't speak much about their customs. I have had the chance to live among them for the last three decades. Better yet: I have embraced their nation. This will be hard to understand for many humans, but I am now a Cynwäll. I have left the protection of the Griffin, the emblem of Akkylannie, for that of the dragons. Maybe I will finally have the strength to give these pages to a messenger for him to deliver them to my family, to my children.

CYNWÄLL POWER

In Akkylannie and in Alahan the notables exercise power and ensure the prosperity of their lands while taking part in that of their nation. In Lanever the exercise of power is in the hands of all. Each city has a grand assembly in which the citizens decide together which actions are to be taken to ensure their prosperity.

THE PILLARS OF THE REPUBLIC

Only Cynwälls can join this assembly, the *ashendil*. However, the term *cynwäll* doesn't have the same meaning in Lanever as it does elsewhere. To strangers a Cynwäll is an elf from Lanever. In reality this is not at all true.

Only those who have proven that they have reached Noesis can sit in the *ashendil*. These are considered to be Cynwälls.

However, anyone, no matter his origins, can benefit from the teachings of Noesis, as long as he sincerely desires it. Of course, the fulfilment of the girder is easier for children raised in Cynwäll culture. For strangers this is a lot harder. For me, after many years of apprenticeship, I succeeded in making this step and becoming a full-fledged citizen of the Republic of Lanever. One thing is for certain, however: only natives of Lanever have managed to go beyond the step of the girder to become equanimes.

When an elf reaches adulthood, he is considered to have passed the girder. However, he must still undergo a ritual of inauguration in the *ashendil* as proof of his capacities. A council of equanimes gathers to evaluate the candidate, who must then prove that he has, on one hand, understood the teachings of Noesis, and on the other, fully grasped its essence. After a series of trials that test the Cynwäll's control of his body (through a demonstration of *shenras*), a last trial tests his control of emotions. Thus, the candidate is questioned, put at fault, and his reactions are evaluated.

THE CYNWÄLL CITY, THE HEART OF POWER

The cities each have their own authority, which is expressed through their *ashendil*. For the Cynwälls this institution has an almost sacred character. I can still remember the first time Edrahil, the equanime who was my mentor for all these years, mentioned it to me.

"You see, Mikrinas, we have often spoken of the image of the tree. And for a long time you sought the solution to this riddle. Our society is a tree and the *ashendil* is its roots. This assembly feeds our society and prevents it from paralysis. It allows us to gather, to ask questions, to express ourselves. Without it, our society would be a tower built on clay. The *ashendil* is the foundation of our constructions. Yet what are roots without the richness of a fertile soil? This you have already understood. Our people is this soil, this richness channelled by the *ashendil*.

Noesis prevails over everything, Mikrinas. A nation is an organism, a tree... you and I. It needs everything in order to prosper. Just like a Cynwäll cannot live just from Light, our nation cannot live just by being carried on the shoulders of our guides."

Several months after this exchange I passed my *shatai*, the step of the girder in the teachings of Noesis. I was allowed to pass the entry trial of the *ashendil* and became a Cynwäll.

In each city the *ashendil* has the same form. The citizens gather under the open sky in Lahn's light. In Wyde the assembly takes place in a gigantic hollow tower whose walls reflect the sunlight at the same time as they dampen it. Thus a harmonious and soft light bathes every meeting. At the top of this building shine the writs of Akaris, the teachings of Noesis, so that everyone remembers the principles that guide our nation. The dragons of the city sit just below, always remaining silent. Once in a while their knights, who sit beside them, speak.

Further below sit the equanimes and then the heliasts. The rest of the tower is occupied by the citizens.

At the centre, on a huge, raised altar surrounded by the *ashendil* and illuminated by the sun, sit the Noesians. They rarely intervene, yet they are charged with watching that the precepts of Light are respected during these assemblies.

On a day-to-day basis the city requires its activity to be regulated and decisions to be applied. That's the role of the **reguluses**. Each city has six of them who are named by the *ashendil* excluding the equanimes and the Noesians. For seven years they set aside their activities to take care of running the city. The reguluses are always individuals of great prestige: heliasts, accomplished helianthic craftsmen, asadar officers, etc.

The reguluses present the decisions to submit to the assembly and make sure that the debates go smoothly.

The first time I assisted the *ashendil*, Edrahil explained to me how honourable this charge was to the Cynwälls: "The reguluses are neither chiefs nor lords. They are instruments in the service of their nation. Their responsibilities are heavy. They have the duty to help their city prosper in the Light without ever getting lost."

NOESIS, THE SEUL OF THE CYNWÄLLS

"When an equanime speaks of Light to guide his fellows, he himself is this Light. Words are meaningless in the face of the Truth. Thus is the Noesian's role in his nation."

Despite the years, I can still remember Edrahil's worried look when he spoke those words. Our relationship had evolved greatly; I was no longer a student trying to pass his *shatai* and he was more a friend than a mentor. We were in the temple of Maelhynn in the heart of Wyde. Further below, several children were simultaneously practicing the sequence of moves called "fortress open to the wind."

Edrahil's gaze wandered off into the distance and lay on the three dragon-peaks and the blue moon beyond. A month earlier he had undergone what I believed was a terrible setback. He had burned his version of the missing chapters of Akaris's treatise. It

was a serious act that symbolised his thorough questioning of his vision and his spirituality. I didn't know the reasons for this act, but that evening Edrahil spoke to me about the Noesians for a very long time. He didn't speak about their quest, but rather about their role as a beacon for the Cynwäll nation. Later I understood that his words weren't meant for me. He was surely seeking to remember what the Noesians, the sages so esteemed by the Cynwälls, were supposed to represent for him.



The tribëns were watching him severely. They had greeted him cautiously and accompanied him into a private sitting room adjoining the First court, a secluded room where they had all settled in a heavy silence. The tribëns, unmasked and hairless, wore wide garnet-red robes belted at the waist and leather boots, and carried the staves of judgment that were the symbol of their neutrality among the Cynwälls. To the clear sound of the staff they sometime used as a weapon, each of the twenty-three tribëns dealt justice and ensured that the three pillars of Cynwäll lore struggled in harmony toward a common goal. The heliasts, the equanimous monks, and the dragon-knights were all duty-bound to obey unquestioningly the decisions and judgments of the tribëns who embodied the wisdom of the Guide.

The Fault of Kaïber, Chapter VI



Though the Noesians don't play an active role in the *ashendils* of Lanever, this doesn't mean that they are totally passive in the Republic's politics, to the contrary. Within the temples and the monasteries the Noesians' authority is limitless. And it is to them that the reguluses turn when their own discernment is insufficient.

For common Cynwälls the equanimes are sages whose lives are totally devoted to Noesis. As for the Noesians, they are obviously held in high esteem, yet they are also seen as distant figures surrounded by Light and far beyond simple mortals. The equanimes therefore avoid playing an important political role. Nevertheless, they are often called on to help resolve litigious cases and to give their opinion on important subjects. This is one of their duties toward the Republic.

Furthermore, the Noesians form a grand council that surpasses the *ashendils* to gather the quintessence of Cynwäll wisdom. This council, the *allianwë*, meets in Laroq. Each Noesian is led there by a dragon and accompanied by an equanime of his choice.

The oldest dragons of Lanever also participate in this council. Unfortunately the equanimes have always remained very discreet when it comes to the role of these venerable creatures. Do they follow Noesis? What is their influence on the *allianwë*'s decisions?

I can only quote what Edrahil confided to me once: "The dragons are very old beings. Some of them have turned to Light well before we did. They know truths that can't be reached by others. Our alliance is like diamond."

The *allianwë* decides on subjects that concern the whole Republic and can't find their answers in the *ashendils*. Recently this council caught the attention of the other nations by deciding that it was time for Lanever to become involved in the Rag'narok. This decision was taken in large part thanks to the equanimes who were present, but the majority of the Noesians remained silent, thus approving this path. Edrahil himself took part in this council. And it's on his return from it that he took the decision mentioned earlier. After that he was no longer invited to return to the *allianwë*. A few months later he left for Kaïber and I have never seen him since. The day of his departure I saw him wearing one of the famous masks that contribute to the Cynwälls' aura.

THE OMÿNSILL, GUIDE OF THE NATION

"Who exactly is the Guide?" This was one of the first questions that I asked Edrahil when I met him. In Akkylannie the word "Emperor" is being said all the time. He embodies the nation's power and majesty. In Lanever the Guide only seems to be a whisper, a distant icon. How far this is from the truth!

"The *Omÿnsill* is the memory, the tradition of Elhan, the one who opened the way. He is also the future, the reflection of Light, the force of the Truth. The Guide doesn't rule. He is. And that's enough, for Light is upon us."

“

The khidarÿms
are his elite troops
and they are dreaded
on all battlefields.

”

No doubt that Edrahil was trying to make me understand the symbolism surrounding the Guide, for in reality he has far-reaching powers over the Cynwälls.

The Guide is a Noesian who isn't chosen by his peers but, for mysterious reasons, by his predecessor. If it happens that the equanimes and the Noesians comment on this decision, then this is always done with great discretion. The Guide sits in Laroq and is assisted by the *allianwë*. This is the institutional heart of the Republic, for in reality the Guide Esneh spends very much time in the University of Wyde.

Surprisingly, the Guide's true powers have never been set, unlike those of each city's institutions. The treatise written by Elhan, the first Guide, defines the political organisation of Lanever, but it doesn't describe the Guide's role. In fact, it seems aberrant to most Cynwälls to even have to detail such responsibilities. The Guide is, after all, a Noesian.

The Guide's powers are military, political and judicial. He directs all of Lanever's armed forces, can raise corps of troops, and can call on the dragon-knights or on the heliasts. The *khidarjims* are his elite troops and they are dreaded on all battlefields. Their concentration and their martial mastery make them prodigious warriors. Though they don't master the same combat techniques as the equanimous warriors, they are no less formidable.

The Guide is also a referent for the Cynwäll nation. He is constantly informed of the cities' affairs and has enough authority to modify an *ashendil's* decision if he judges it to be harmful to the Republic. The Guide can also remove a regulus or cancel a judgement that seems unfair to him.

In his gargantuan job he is assisted by special magistrates charged with representing him within the various Cynwäll communities, be they in Lanever or elsewhere. These magistrates are called *tribëns*. Usually they are decorated former officers who have decided to retire from combat, yet still wish to serve the Guide.

Their authority depends on the Guide's goodwill. Esneh has given them many attributions. Thus, the *tribëns* make sure that the troops answer to the wishes of the army's supreme chief and not to those of the *ashendils* or the garrison leaders. There are, however, places where the *tribëns* remain powerless: in the monasteries and temples. The equanimes are completely free of this authority as long as they remain in their brotherhoods. In Käiber this exception goes even further. In effect, during the second battle against the Acheronian forces the equanimes' heroic feats have allowed them to gain total independence. Thus, the brotherhoods that are present in the fortress of Light only obey their own hierarchy.

The Guide must use his powers sparingly, for he is above all the guarantor of the stability of Lanever. His role is to keep the Cynwäll people on the side of Light and Noesis.

Yet the last words that Edrahil spoke before leaving Wyde have never stopped tormenting me.

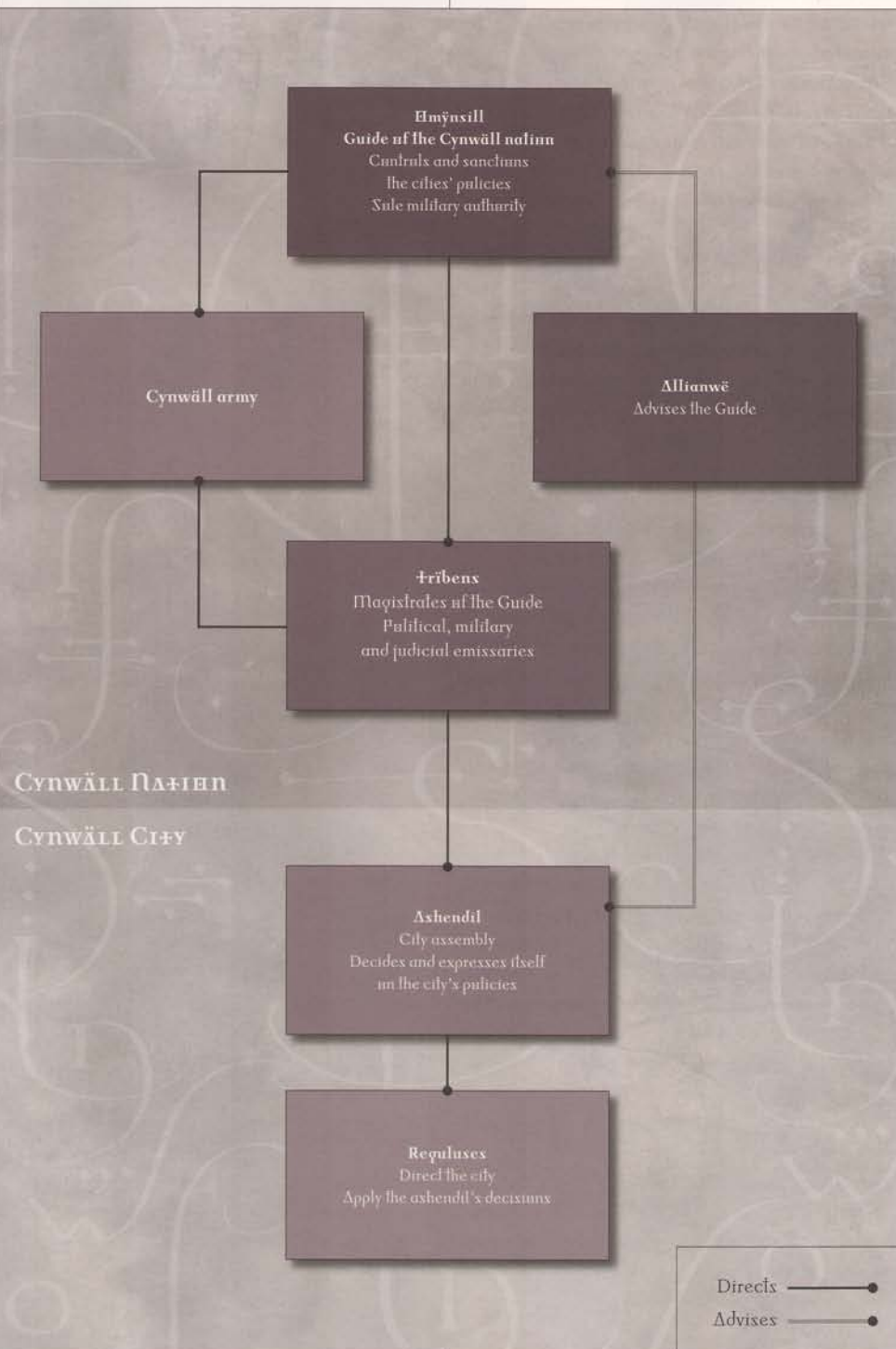
"Today Light seems to be stronger. Our dragons fly over the shadowy lands where Darkness reigns. Our *selsjyms* are marching with our allies under Light. Yet to me it seems to be rawer, Mikrinas. What it has gained in strength it has lost in harmony. Light alone is not the Truth! If one stares at Lahn for too long, his shine begins to burn. I fear that the Light we invoke today will blind us tomorrow.

We have set our path. Noesis is our gift to Aark-lash. I don't think that we have strayed, no... Yet is the Light that now guides us really our own? Haven't

we opened our hearts to a different source, one that is older and has been subdued until now?"

I must admit that I have never understood what he meant by those words. Now that Edrahil has left, it seems to me that his words were dictated by dark thoughts. Never would I have thought that I'd hear those words from the mouth of an equanime. My human nature surely pushes me to some sort of understanding for a friend who is prey to doubt.

Mikrinas Rigeus,
University of Wyde



CYNWÄLL SOCIETY

DEFENCE OF THE NATION

The sun was rising and its first rays hadn't reached the valley yet, since it was hidden by the Behemoth Mountains. The night had been exhausting for us as well as for the Cynwälls. During those dark hours our falconers had sent their birds of prey to track our prey while the varsýms rushed off over the rocks. The hunt had ended with a short battle. The morbid puppets had quickly been neutralised and the necromancer's resistance was swept aside by the power of the magician who was leading the troops of Lanever.

At daybreak everyone was getting ready for a few hours of rest. Barhans on one side, Cynwälls on the other. There was still a long way to go before the alliance became friendship. The Cynwälls kept a distant attitude, yet this suited our brothers-in-arms perfectly well.

One of the elven scouts had remained standing at a distance from his companions, his face turned toward the Behemoth Mountains and the rising sun. After morning prayers to Arin, I decided to join the Cynwäll. When I got nearer he nodded his head in greeting. He was still wearing his bloodstained armour and the varsýms' veil.

"You're their bard, aren't you? The one who gives them courage?"

To tell the truth, I was surprised that he spoke to me first. It was a good start.

"I guess you can see it that way," I answered, "yet I prefer to believe that each man has his own courage. I only awakened it, feed it and maintain it so that doubt and fear don't stifle it. I imagine that this is hard to understand for a Cynwäll."

"Those who seek the Truth do not deny feelings."

"I thought that the Cynwälls scorned emotions, that they refused to feel any. It is said that your masks are used to hide them."

"Noesis is not refusal of one's self but the search for lucidity. In combat some emotions are harmful. You have understood this yourself. Your companions may doubt, yet you work on keeping them concentrated on the battle's stakes: survival and victory. If all your warriors were like you, your nation would be even greater... and also wiser."

That was a barely veiled jab. I knew that the elves were like that, always ready to put us down. But at least this one was willing to talk.

"The troops of Alahan are valiant. Honour, pride and bravery are their allies. I don't think that this weakens them. As for me, I'm above all a fighter. The circaeus allows me to galvanise the troops and to support them in battle. Don't your warrior-mages do the same?"



“

I devote myself exclusively to the defence of my people under Light. The selsýms only serve as long as they are asked to. This isn't my case. When I decide to retire, my city will welcome me. My weapon and armour will then be given to another Cynwäll.

”

"Among us, all are selsýms, warriors. Every Cynwäll learns the basis of *shenras* and knows how to control himself in the chaos of combat. Belonging to the Republic means being ready to fight for it. We don't leave this task to a minority."

"All Cynwälls? Like in Akkylannie, you all get military training?"

"No, in Lanever every Cynwäll learns Noesis. This includes the mastery of our martial techniques, for

we are all destined to serve in our ranks. Every year we devote time to the defence of the Republic. The rest of the time we ensure the prosperity of our cities and of Lanever. Defending the Republic is everyone's affair. This is a part of our teachings."

"But you aren't a selsým. What are the varsýms, the asadars and the equanimes?"

"The equanimes aren't warriors, at least not all of them. Being a monk is first and foremost a total engagement in Noesis. Some decide to follow the path of the warrior while others remain on that of the exile. But the latter don't mingle with the armies of the Alliance."

"I gather that you're neither a selsým nor an equanime."

"I devote myself exclusively to the defence of my people under Light. The selsýms only serve as long as they are asked to. This isn't my case. When I decide to retire, my city will welcome me. My weapon and armour will then be given to another Cynwäll."

"And what about the dragon-knights?"

"They are the companions of our most valuable and faithful allies. That is their commitment. That is how they seek the Truth."

"The dragons practice Noesis? Is it they who have taught it to you?"

"The dragons are a wise people. Their sapience is older than the Behemoth Mountains. The Truth is of use only if it is passed on. What good is what's true if no one knows it?"

"You haven't answered my question."

"The dragons have their own traditions. The dragon-knights accompany them. They learn from those older; they teach those younger."

"Your magician is a Noesian, isn't he? He's one of those who guide you?"

"He's a heliast. He's under the Light."

"Isn't that Noesis?"

"Do you follow Light?"

"Yes, of course."

"So does Galhyan, yet that doesn't make him a Noesian. The heliasts master solaris and share the knowledge of the ancients. Some, such as Galhyan, engage themselves in the Rag'narok and give their support to our troops. Others seek the Truth in the past or design the tools of the future."

"So the heliasts are the ones who forge your weapons and your armour? And your masks, too?"

"That is their craft."

"So these masks aren't bound to Noesis?"

As soon as I asked this question I realised how impolite I was being. Broaching such subjects right in our first conversation was surely rather tactless. The Cynwäll remained silent.

A moment later the heliastic magician turned his head toward us and the *varsjym* got up to join him. He threw a last glance at me and, despite the twilight, I'm sure that I could make out a smile on his face...

**Report by the bard Alhios
to Egeus, baron of Icqur.**



JUSTICE

The exercise of justice in Lanever is as rare as the laws are strict for anyone who commits a crime. Yet the Cynwälls are loath to spill blood. This point of view clearly is strange, especially when one knows that one of the toughest punishments is ostracism of the one responsible, meaning his permanent exile from all of the Republic's cities. In other words, the Cynwäll judges let criminals remain constantly on the run!

For Cynwälls the most abhorred crime isn't necessarily murder, except when it concerns dragons. Other than that, as my eminent colleague Anathodle of the University of Kallienne has so well written, the Cynwälls don't see death in the same way as we do. They therefore don't give life the same importance as we do. The worst crimes are bound to the destruction or theft of knowledge. I was also able to observe that for an elf, mutilation is a worse act than murder. Diminishing without causing death is the worst horror one can cause a living being to suffer.

Rare are the academics, be they travellers or not, who have really been able to discover Cynwäll society. Anathodle of Kallienne mainly reports elements bound to the spirituality of the elves of Lanever, but not those of their daily life.

Therefore I must admit my pride in being a part of the eminent Free University of Cadwallon. Indeed, our city harbours Cynwälls, which has allowed me to gather a certain amount of testimony on the judicial system in Lanever's cities.

It is obvious that the Cynwäll sages, the Noesians, hold great spiritual authority over the population. This authority also covers the courts in which the Noesians play the role of prime judges. They are flanked by five representatives of the city who are always heliasts, the magician craftsmen at the root of Lanever's prosperity.

The heliasts take care of leading the trial while the Noesian remains passive. They question, enquire and present their conclusions. Yet the final decision is made by the Noesian who, not having taken part in the debates and quarrels, is able to remain clear-headed and impartial when making his judgement.

It's interesting to note that this procedure never varies, whether one is judging a Cynwäll for a crime or one is settling a dispute.

Indeed, in the Republic of Lanever the thought that two citizens can be unable to find a compromise on their own is considered to be a menace to society. In such a case lucidity no longer prevails and the resulting disturbance of the balance is taken extremely seriously.

The most serious affairs can be brought before the Guide. He then sits with five magistrates who are bound to him: the *tribëns*. These individuals play the same part as the heliasts in the other trials. The worst cases, at least those that the Cynwälls I questioned

could remember, concerned the death of a dragon or the murder of a Noesian.

In both cases the accused wasn't a Cynwäll. In the second one the murderer was an assassin in the service of the Akkyshans. Both times the final sentence was beheading. I am unable to say if this punishment was declared due to the origin of the accused. What good would it have done to banish an elf from Ashinân?

Prodded on by my legitimate curiosity, I did some research on crimes committed by dragons themselves. Unfortunately information is very rare. For the most part the dragons follow their own traditions. Yet legend has it that a dragon named Lothren Maloth was judged by the Guide himself after the massacre of an equanimous brotherhood. The execution was entrusted to the dragons of Laroq and the corpse was thrown into the Gulf of Syrlih.

**Cleothene Danill, professor emeritus of the
Free University of Cadwallon.**





FURY AND THE NEESIAN

Serving the crown of Alahan was an exciting job. Yet advisor Arnor de Sienanth was weary. He was waiting for the Cynwäll ambassador and was still asking himself which diplomatic treasure he would have to use to convince him to be on the kingdom's side in the affair that was on his mind.

Arnor left his thoughts when ambassador Lyassar's footsteps, which were unlike any others, could be heard in the hallway. The door was open and the ambassador came in.

"Thank you for having come so quickly, Excellency."

"Where is your king?"

"In the council hall. He has asked me to explain the situation to you."

The Cynwäll remained silent. His piercing gaze dove deep into the advisor's eyes. There was something in the ambassador's eyes, like a strange glow, that made the Lion feel ill at ease. Yet his gaze didn't waver.

"I'm listening to you," said the ambassador while moving toward the fireplace.

"The king has had you summoned for an affair of utmost importance. The situation is becoming more and more worrisome. The Drones have attacked Tain and managed to break through the lines of defence. They have been pushed back but the Sessairs' losses are heavy."

"My answer is no."

"Let me explain the..."

"No, and Gorgyn knows it."

The Cynwäll's voice echoed in the room. The advisor knew that bursts of silence were important

DIPLOMACIES

THE SECOND BATTLE OF KAÏBER MARKS THE CYNWÄLLS' GOING TO WAR. EVER SINCE THEN, THE ALLIANCE OF LIGHT'S MEMBERS HAVE BEEN SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND THE PHILOSOPHY OF THESE MYSTERIOUS ELVES AND HAVE ATTEMPTED TO LEAD THEM TO BETTER FORTS. THEY NOW HAVE TO COUNT ON THE ENVOYS OF THE REPUBLIC OF LANEVER.

He remained silent for a long time without removing his eyes from the unfathomable elf before him. Only the crackle of the logs burning in the fireplace disturbed the silence. A log burst and some embers were shot out onto the stone floor. The advisor took this noise to be an invitation to continue the conversation.

"His Majesty believes that certain new elements should make you change your mind."

"The Sessairs have joined the ways of Light?"

This was the kind of situation the advisor hated. In the four years that he has been working for the kingdom of Alahan's diplomatic relations he had unmasked many spies and countered many false arguments, yet he still couldn't manage to figure out the ambassador. Was he being ironic or sincere? It was impossible to tell.

The council hall's door opened and the king walked in.

"Good evening, Excellency, thank you for having come so quickly in the middle of the night."

"Don't mention it. Good evening, your Majesty."

"Arnor has explained the situation to you?"

"He was in the midst of doing so, but you already know my answer."

"I know your reasons and I respect them, but the Sessairs are our allies."

"Yours, yes."

"They walk in the Light just like we do."

The ambassador didn't say a thing. Adopting Barhan customs was one thing, but constantly repeating what was and what wasn't was impossible for him. He couldn't understand the interest of these discussions. The humans always felt the need to inform each other of the brightness of this and that sun in the skies of Aarklash.

"Come, Excellency. Let me introduce you to a Sessairs dignitary. Viraë is one of our allies' war chiefs."

The ambassador followed the king into the throne hall. He greeted the queen of the fiannas. When their gazes met, the tension became tangible. Viraë had heard about the ambassador's gaze, a gaze that some compared to the twin suns whose mysterious apparitions fed the discourses of sages of Destiny and esoterists of Light.

King Gorgyn had been clear: she knew that she mustn't blink, for the Cynwäll could interpret it to be a sign of duplicity.

The ambassador scanned the Kelt's emerald eyes. On the surface he saw much strength and pride. He was surprised not to find the slightest hint of defiance. He pierced deeper into her gaze and the glow of his pupils became more intense.

Two disks of pure light, thought Viraë. Was the elf trying to subject her or simply to impress her? Viraë was the queen of the fiannas, not a courtesan. She had known wars and its pain. She had taken many lives. The blood of the Sessairs flowed in her veins. She wouldn't blink! *Even if this meant losing her sight!*

The ambassador was again surprised by the fianna's determination. Never had he seen such intensity in a human's eyes. He couldn't keep himself from thinking of the stars dancing in the dragons' oblique eyes while he peered into Viraë's gaze.

"The answer is no."

"You have the merit of being direct and frank," answered Viraë. "But I would like you to listen to what I have to say."

"The humans like to talk. We respect your customs. I'm listening to you."

The Kelt didn't have to gather her thoughts. Her determination was faultless.

"The situation is becoming worse. The Drones are preparing something. They have attacked Tain."

"The advisor has told me about that."

"That attack was a decoy. They want us to strengthen the city's defences. They are preparing something with their new allies. The Devourers are marching with them."

"This doesn't change anything."

"If they become organised, then no one will be spared."

"The only front that is important to my people is Kaïber. I can understand that the Sessairs don't have any regiments at Kaïber, for Acheron's evil influence isn't your priority. I understand this, but you must also understand that we don't want to engage ourselves in a war that doesn't concern us."

"You're wrong. The blood of the Sessairs has



stained the snow of the Behemoth Mountains. We have troops patrolling the region. What more, centaurs give support to the cavalry of Alahan. The blood of our two peoples is mingling, Excellency... and it is of the same colour."

The ambassador looked the fianna up and down as she seemed close to giving in to the fury that was typical of her people.

"You intervened to help your allies, not to battle Darkness."

"Send us a few of your dragons and that would be enough."

There was a silence. The ambassador's face closed up and Viräe could feel an icy cold lash at her face. Her lips began to tremble.

"The dragons are not instruments."

"I... I didn't mean to offend you."

"It's not me who you are offending."

"We aren't asking for an army! I know about the dragons' feats at Kaiber and I know that they fight Darkness with more ferocity than the Akkylannians. Aerial support would be of great help to us. The Drones have no way of defending themselves from an attack from above once they have come out of their holes."

"I know all that, but your people is inconsistent. It is animated by fury. And fury hampers concentration."

"We have never attacked you!"

"No."

"So why do you refuse to help us?"

"You don't have any authority. You aren't federated. You lack organisation in your battles."

"This diversity is our strength. Only tyrants don't allow discord. I could just as easily criticise you." The ambassador didn't say a thing but his gaze invited Viräe to say what was on her mind. "You think too much before acting. Your concentration is... a weakness. You are becoming predictable and lack initiative. In war one must know to improvise. While assassins must remain as cold as a sword's blade, warriors must burn from the inside like Lahn when he's shining at the zenith. You are surely wiser than we are, but we don't have to prove anything to you. We were walking on Aarklash well before your people and even before the elves."

The queen of the fiannas had spoken with a single breath, gripped by anger. Fury had fired up her heart.

The Cynwäll ambassador remained silent. His gaze began glowing again and Viräe understood that he was trying to pierce her emotions, as if he wanted to show that she wasn't in control of her anger. He was wrong; she had learned to control it a long time ago. She knew that she shouldn't give in to it but feed from it. Fury was a weakness, yes, but when controlled, it became a force. The Cynwälls would have to accept this.

The ambassador felt the flame that was burning inside the Kelt. He had never encountered someone enclosing such an inferno. Viräe was different from the other humans. The fury didn't seem to be consuming her. It rather gave her strength. The Cynwäll wanted to check this by putting her to test.

"You fight amongst yourselves."

"Those are only quarrels."

"Lots of blood has been spilled for these quarrels."

"To us, dying in combat is a good thing."

"No matter what the combat may be for?"

"I'm not asking you to adhere to my culture. To you it is incorrect to express one's emotions; for us it's the opposite. For you there should be one chief and only one, not for us."

"The Guide is not a chief."

"Well, then let's just say that we have several guides."

"You have several chiefs."

"They don't impose themselves. We follow them freely and anyone can defy them. Nothing is immutable."

"The Truth is immutable."

"Sure, but Light isn't. It can be put out."

Viräe stared at the ambassador with insistence. The Cynwäll wasn't able to hold back a slight, fleeting smile that the fianna nevertheless noticed. A feeling of victory lit her gaze and the elf then understood that that was what she had been seeking right from the start.

He obviously liked her. Maybe the Sessairs were walking in the Light after all.

"The dragons are the only ones who can decide if they'll help you or not."

"You could ask them."

"I'm not a messenger."

"Could you help me meet them?"

"You will have to prove that you really are what you claim to be and explain your point of view with an open heart as you have done with me. If you are walking along the ways of Light, then they'll know it and maybe we'll become allies."

"Is that a test? You want to know if my people is worthy of your help in its struggle against Darkness?"

"If you want my people to be ready to sacrifice itself for yours, then you will have to learn to know us so that we can find our shared values."

"Then come with me to Avagddu. I'll introduce you to our chiefs. If we must get to know you, then you must also make a step in our direction."

The Cynwäll ambassador agreed. The Sessairs' fury wasn't leading them to the path of hatred. Viraë was the living proof that it could bring them wisdom.

THE SCERPIEN'S STINGER

The three Cynwälls were standing in front of a wooden door. The smell of rot mixed with the one of humidity that filled the corridors.

"What can we expect?" asked the asadar.

Officially the asadar was the one leading the operation. The equanimous warrior was there as support. As for the varsým, he was the one who had spotted the Syhar laboratory and was the only one to have already explored one.

"Nothing more than what we have already dealt with," whispered the varsým while bending down to inspect a lock. "Probably one or two creatures and a few traps. Get back against the wall."

The two Cynwälls obeyed without asking questions. The varsým inserted a metal wire into the lock. A clicking sound was heard and a small poison arrow was shot into the tunnel. Darhyan then continued fiddling with the lock.

"Are they always the same ones?" whispered the equanime.

"There are the typical ones, such as this booby-trapped lock. The Syhars are inventive, but this lab isn't very big, so the chances are slim that we bump into any bad surprises."

"Do we know why they come here?"

"To be less bothered than in Alahan, I suppose. It's open..."

The varsým stepped aside to let the asadar pass by. The two others got behind him in a single file. The elite fighter unsheathed his blade and brutally pushed the door open. A monstrous wildcat suddenly pounced out at him. The narrow passage gave the beast the advantage as its fangs bit down on the asadar's arm. The tiger scratched its prey's legs, causing him to reel. The asadar concentrated on his breathing. The creature was tugging at his arm, aware that



it was preventing the other Cynwälls from attacking. The elf pulled his injured arm toward himself. The tiger tightened its grip. The asadar let himself be carried by the movement and spun to hit the wall. His shoulder was dislocated with a loud crack. The asadar pushed himself flat against the wall. He could no longer defend himself and his back was exposed, but the varsým now had an open field. Darhyan brought one of his blades down on the beast. The tiger just barely avoided the blow, but the tip of the sword cut deep into its paw.

The creature let go of the asadar's arm and jumped on the varsým, who thrust his left arm and his second blade forward at the wildcat's chest. Carried by its momentum, the tiger violently fell onto the varsým before it collapsed.

Without saying a word, the asadar put his shoulder back in place and threw a glance at the varsým, who gave him a sign with his head, and then entered the room that had been guarded by the tiger.

When the equanime and the asadar also entered the room, Darhyan was already at its far end near another door. The scout signalled his companions to be alert and then ripped the door open. He just had the time to see the shape of a man rushing through a black gate.

"Too late..."

"It doesn't matter," the asadar reassured him, "they know that we have uncovered them. They haven't had the time to scatter like in other places and will surely put their implantations on hold."

"On the contrary," said the equanime. "They'll be extra careful and will strengthen their defences. The next laboratories will be more dangerous than this one. That's how things went in Alahan."

"Why do they insist on leaving their homeland?" asked the asadar.

"For the raw materials," murmured Darhyan while pointing to the walls.

The sketches hanging on the walls were eloquent: pyrogenic glands, scaly structures, membranal wings... The head omnimancer in this laboratory was studying the dragons.

"So this is only the beginning..."

"Yes, I fear."

The Cynwälls exchanged glances. Their unease could be felt.

"There's nothing left to do here. Let's burn everything," said the asadar.

"First we have to recover the notes," objected Darhyan while searching the many shelves.

The equanime grabbed him by the arm.

"All knowledge is not good, my friend." The varsým harshly pushed away the monk and continued searching. "I know that you don't want to do wrong, but I'm telling you again: all knowledge is not good."

"I'm obeying orders."

"Well, then we have a problem," interjected the asadar. "My orders are to burn everything."

"These notes will help us know our enemy better to enable us to fight him more efficiently."

"Or to convince the most hesitant among us that our collaboration with the Inquisition is justified," said the equanime.

The varsým glared at him. *To Darkness with proprieties*, he thought before speaking with a strong voice.

"They're studying the dragons! Now is not the time for irony or cultural conflicts! The equanimes must accept their responsibilities..."

"What are you insinuating?"

"It's the *allianwë* that got our people involved in this war."

"I'm not part of it."

"That's not the question. It's the equanimes who forced the council's hand, right?"

"We don't control the *allianwë*."

The monk's voice was calm, always neutral, yet he was also having a hard time holding himself back. Deep down, did he know that the varsým was right? That the Cynwälls' engagement against Darkness would have to be total and not just against Acheron? That they would have to use all weapons at their disposal? The varsým then continued, his voice firm yet calm, almost fatherly.

"Once again, that's not the question. The Noesians advocate standing back from everything. Well, we don't all think that way. We're at war; the time for meditation is over."

The equanime didn't react. He was concentrating on his muscle structure. He had to think. The asadar remained at a distance. He was more of the varsým's opinion, but he didn't like his way of expressing it very much. If the equanimes hadn't pushed to go to war,

Darkness would probably have been much stronger by now. He decided to take command of things.

"Darhyan, gather the notes and sketches, leave the rest behind. Sayim, inspect the gate and see what information you can get from it. I'll get the fire ready."

Their return trip was made in silence. Their dispute had awakened something in them, something that made them fear dark days ahead, yet which, paradoxically, had brought them nearer to Noesis. Now they had a better understanding of the Noesians' restraint, for they knew that their people's unity was fragile and could be broken.

LETTER BACK HOME

My dear Leandra,

I'm sorry that I haven't written earlier, but the foreman barely leaves us time to eat and sleep. Even though I won't be able to see you for many months, I don't regret having accepted this contract. The Cynwälls really deserve their reputation. They are even more mysterious than I had thought. First of all, they are cold and tough, yet they hide great sadness or weariness in their hearts, like a wound that cannot heal. They speak very little, except when they are questioned. That is a quality that I like a lot. Their discipline is strict, yet they are just. And they are a bit less demanding of their allies than they are of themselves.

Despite their great knowledge, I am surprised on a daily basis by their ignorance in certain subjects. The vessels in their fleet were designed ignoring all common sense. Aesthetically they are sublime. Slender and impressive, they have the grace of their creators yet are slow and surprisingly fragile. I can understand why they have called on us as well as on shipbuilders from Alahan.

These exchanges benefit all three of our nations. We learn many techniques from the Barhans for the sails and hull. In return, we teach them how to use the cannons. The goal is to find a balance and I think that we're on the right track. Soon, Light shall triumph on the seas!

The Cynwälls learn quickly and, unlike what they say in certain lands, they listen very carefully. Sometimes they are peremptory, yet only when they are sure that they know. The elves are very respectful of the knowledge that we bring them and they don't try to impose their customs on us. They have forbidden us from proselytising and several workers and blacksmiths have been sent back to Akkylannie for having tried to convert their Lion colleagues, yet

the Cynwälls remain curious about our beliefs and sometimes ask questions about our motivations and our faith. I think that they are trying to understand us and admit that there are other paths that follow Light. They have adapted our working hours to allow us to follow the Church of Merin's dogma and have provided us with a hall in a temple near the port. This hall is decorated to perfection: drapery, stained glass windows, ritual objects... Everything was done to give the impression of being in a real church of the Empire.

Seeing the speed with which we are advancing, I think that I'll be able to return home by next spring. I hope that you make sure that Lea says all her prayers.

Kisses to both of you.

May Merin protect you.

Phortéos.

THE INNER BEAST

The two Cynwälls were walking at a fast pace. The first one was a Noesian and this could be seen. His face inspired calm and his body seemed to be glowing with a soft luminous aura. The second one could be recognised by his clothes: he was an equanime and seemed to be a lot less at peace.

"The Devourers are an open wound on the face of Aarklash," proclaimed the equanime, thus breaking the silence that reigned in the corridor.

"Have I said the contrary?" the Noesian answered calmly.

"You said that they had their use, that they could help the Wolfen evolve. In short, that they are a necessary evil. You said..."

The Noesian cut him off and turned to face the monk. His face was still expressionless, but his aura had vanished.

"My words slide off you like water on marble when you should be feeding from them," he said dryly. "You interpret more than you listen. That's a fault that you



have always had, but now is the time to free yourself of it. Yes, the Devourers are evil. They haven't joined Darkness yet, but their instinct relentlessly pushes them to it and it's only a question of time before they succumb to the Dark Principle."

For a second the equanime let his perplexity show. He always had a hard time controlling himself when the one he considered to be his master treated him like a child. Yet he knew from experience that letting himself get carried away was useless. The Noesian acted like a mirror: his tone had been dry because his student's had also been so just before. The equanime concentrated to find inner peace and then spoke again in the conversation's tone.

"So then we agree. In that case, why did you contradict me in front of the *allianwë*?"

The Noesian began walking again and let a long silence float in the air.

"The truth, even if it's painful to hear, remains the truth," he calmly answered. "I didn't enjoy it at all, but you had forgotten, or underestimated, the second principle. What more, you confused the Wolfen and the Devourers, when you are one of those who know them the best."

"I'm aware of that, master; my choice of words was clumsy. Yet from there to claiming that the Devourers can help the Wolfen's evolution..."

"I didn't intervene because I didn't agree, but because you were letting yourself become overwhelmed by your emotions."

The equanime froze. He had been thinking about his master's speech ever since they had left the hall of the *allianwë*. Never had he thought about his own. He knew that he had taken a few shortcuts (and rather awkward ones) to avoid endless debates. Yet on hearing this last remark he became aware of what he had said. He had just returned from a three-month hunt through the forests of Lanever. He had seen the massacres committed by the Devourers: partially eaten animals, bandits and wanderers sometimes killed in their sleep, and, above all, a village in which women and children had been decimated. He had personally led the punitive expedition, yet this hadn't erased the visions of horror. The Noesian carried on, apparently unaware of his student's inner turmoil.

"The Devourers may let the Wolfen evolve precisely because they are the embodiment of their vilest instincts. They are their Nemesis, the image of what the children of Yllia will become if they don't stop misleading themselves by refusing to accept that reason isn't instinct's enemy. What is bad isn't always the enemy of what's good, on the contrary. The Alliance of Light wouldn't exist if it weren't for Darkness, and we all ask ourselves what our Akkylannian allies would be up to if there were no Darkness."

"I understand. I'm... sorry."

"Why?"

"Because I doubted you."

"You shouldn't be ashamed, I also sometimes doubt my judgement."

"I think that I was shocked by what I've seen. Have I already told you about what they had done to the children?"

"I was able to observe the consequences of such a raid in Alahan. We must hope that the Wolfen will take care of this problem themselves. They can learn to master their instincts without denying them."

"Admit it, they can also end up succumbing to Darkness."

"As can we all." The Noesian got closer to the equanime. "I was thinking of going to Diisha in the next few weeks to meet with some of their pack leaders. If only they could catch even just a glimpse of the light of Noesis..."

"The *allianwë* won't let you go there."

"I wasn't planning on asking for its permission. Kyla Maloth thinks the same way I do."

"You two have always agreed with each other... I'm coming with you, if you don't mind."

"Why?"

"I believe that this is what I have to do... now."

The two Cynwälls left the very next day. They rode on the back of Kyla Maloth, an extremely old female dragon whose body and mind were still very vigorous and sharp. Their journey was made in silence. The Noesian meditated. The equanime mentally repeated the various postures to adopt when meeting the Wolfen. He knew about 20 different ones. When used incorrectly they led to a certain death. When used correctly, they didn't guarantee survival in any way.



When they arrived above Diisha, the dragon began their descent in a spiral. The equanime guided her. They had to find a clearing that didn't have a stone circle devoted to Yllia.

After an hour they landed. The equanime quickly jumped from Kyla's back and got into a defensive posture. Concentrating on his hearing, he listened for any unusual sound that could indicate a pack's presence.

"No cause for worry," he whispered, "but it's only a question of time. I doubt that we went unnoticed."

The equanime was only partially wrong. About 30 metres away, hidden in the thickets, yellow eyes were watching them. It was a group of hunters who had spotted the dragon in the sky some time ago. For now the Wolfen were hesitating. Bringing back this enormous reptile's head would cover them in glory, yet to do so they would have to kill it first. Furthermore, they didn't know anything at all about the humanoids who were with the creature. One of them was in a defensive posture. He therefore knew their language, yet his clothes showed his ties with the Craftsman. The bipeds' faces looked like those of the Daikinees, yet they were longer and... strange. The reptile turned its head toward the hunters and made a hoarse sound.

"There are wild creatures in the undergrowth, over there," said Kyla in a language that the Wolfen didn't understand.

"Can you smell them?" asked the equanime.

"No, they are downwind, but I sense the presence of the inner beast. They are containing it, but it is there. There are others coming nearer."

The Wolfen continued observing silently. Had they been detected? Suddenly they smelled an odour coming from the other side of the clearing. It was an odour that they didn't like at all: that of Devourers. The latter didn't seem to care about the wind's direction and didn't try to hide. Among the Wolfen hunters some wanted to leave, believing that the fight was lost in advance. Yet they stayed, for they had to find out if the followers of Vile-Tis had new allies.

About a dozen Wolfen Devourers appeared at the edge of the woods, on the far side of the hunters' hiding place. Most of them were in a posture of domination, the others in an aggressive one. Kyla let a bit of smoke come out of her muzzle to let them know that if they attacked, they wouldn't get away unharmed. The equanime changed posture: neither fear nor submission should be shown to the Devourers. An ill-boding silence reigned in the clearing. Some Devourers were baring their fangs, but none of them attacked.

After a long minute, other individuals appeared from the thickets and positioned themselves in front of the Devourers. The Cynwälls were dumbstruck when they saw their faces, which were neither really elven nor completely human. They were half-elves.

The equanime lost his concentration and was about to speak to these individuals in the Daikinee tongue (which is more widespread than that of the Cynwälls), but Kyla stopped him.

"Mount," she whispered.

For a second he hesitated. A bit longer and they would have all been dead. The dragon had sensed the subtle change in the smell of the Devourers whose muscles were being soaked with adrenaline. They were getting ready to attack. As soon as the monk was sitting on her back, the dragon flew off. The Devourers began howling to frighten the run-aways as well as to mark their victory.

"Where are they from?"

"Let's return to Lanever, Kyla."

"You don't want to try another clearing?" asked the equanime.

Once again the Noesian remained silent. The hour was serious. If the half-elves have joined the Devourers, then the Cynwälls could no longer ignore them. They couldn't either declare war on them without understanding their reasons. The *allianwë* had to be informed and envoys had to be sent to the forest of Quithayran and to Cadwallon in order to find out if the Daikinee half-elves had federated. They had to be Daikinees; the Cynwäll half-elves had the same rights as their pure-blooded brethren.

This idea gave him a blow. He had just thought of the purity of blood. The Cynwälls advocated tolerance and he himself was a Noesian. How could he have associated these two words? A cultural remnant from before the exile? He was unable to concentrate. His cheeks were burning and a feeling of unease filled every cell in his body. He sensed the coming of a very dark period for Lanever. Soon, nothing would be the same any longer.

THE DRAGONS IN THE LIGHT

To the attention of King Gorgyn and the advisors Sienanth and Arbalath,

Your Majesty,

I inform you that my research has caused some resentment due to questions felt to be indiscreet, even indecent, and that it will take me several months to earn back the trust of certain of my sources.

As you know, we will be able to count on the Cynwälls as soon as we attack the fiends of Darkness, yet they will not engage themselves in all conflicts. Their army is smaller than ours, their population is lower, and they surely won't be able to be present at several fronts.

Already being engaged at Kaiber and at the front line should the Akkyshans go to war against Light, the Cynwälls will not engage themselves in a new conflict. This doesn't mean that they won't give us



their support. As you know, their exchange with the Akkylannians is flourishing, the latter having sent them workers and maritime engineers to help them design and build a true fleet to help us in the struggle against goblin pirates as well as to watch and defend their coasts, especially the border with Ashinân.

The dwarves of Mid-Nor are not a direct threat for them. What more, they believe that the dwarves of Tir-Nâ-Bor should take care of this problem. Though the latter have their respect, the elves of Lanever don't like the dwarven fortresses' isolationist policies in this dark hour.

Their position in regard to the Daikinees is similar. The Cynwälls are convinced that the elves of Quithayran must choose their camp very soon. Some seem convinced that the Daikinees are responsible for the advent of the Akkyshans and that a strong engagement against the latter would allow the former to make up for their past mistakes. Most Cynwälls are sure that the Daikinees would never turn to Darkness.

I'll be short on the authorities of Lanever's position concerning the Devourers and the Drones. The Cynwälls won't allow pillaging or massacres on their lands and will come to our aid in case of an open conflict. They don't seem to be worried about the presence of half-elves in the packs of Devourers. I don't know why. Maybe they place Light before blood ties?

More interesting is their position regarding the Wolfen and the orcs. Among the peoples of destiny, these are the ones that are the greatest cause for hope, especially the orcs. As for the Wolfen, the Cynwälls think that they are still at an animal stage, but they consider it legitimate for these creatures to want to defend their territory. They nevertheless hope that they will evolve and walk along the ways of Light in the near future. Some Noesians believe that the Wolfen will align themselves with the Daikinees. The orcs arouse greater respect. The

Cynwälls are even those who promoted commercial trade between the forces at Kaiber and the orcs of the Behemoth Mountains. The elves seem to be convinced that these mountain dwellers would have become our allies if it hadn't been for their conflict with the Akkylannians. The Cynwälls have a certain disregard for the Temple's actions in Bran-Ô-Kor and I wouldn't be surprised if they try to make the Church change its policies in the coming months. It may even be possible that the real goal of the collaboration between the Cynwälls and the Inquisition in the search for Syhar laboratories is to strengthen the elves' influence on the religious institutions of the Griffin. I think that the Cynwälls mustn't be taken to be naïve. They are wise, they learn quickly and understand us better than we think they do.

Surprisingly, the subject that divides them the most is Cadwallon. This can surely be partially explained by the history of this city, which, as a reminder, was a Cynwäll city for a very long time. By the way, no elf ever accepted to explain why the site had been abandoned. The theories claiming an epidemic or a natural catastrophe don't seem to be viable. Some even reacted badly to my questions on this subject.

To get back to Cadwallon, though many seem to think that it should remain neutral ground, a diplomatic zone, others hope to see it annexed by the forces of Light or at least "cleansed" to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Dark ones or the Akkyshans. I'm sure that you won't have any trouble influencing their policies if you adopt one of these positions as being yours. You are probably the human that they respect the most, your Majesty, and they don't grant their respect easily.

Your devoted Alcinanthe Karan

Sitting in the study of the one who had triggered his interest for the vestiges of the past, Mehöl sat up straight while taking a deep breath. He shuddered and placed his mask in front of him. Larshaen observed him with his black eyes that glittered with mischief, but for now his face looked worried. Sitting cross-legged on the floor, master and disciple faced each other in the calm of an alcove bathed in the soft glow of a sapharantis cocoon.

Larshaen got up nimbly and went to take care of something in the corner of the room. The sound of water being heated could soon be heard. Letting his gaze travel across the incredible collection of objects assembled in the room, Mehöl silently enjoyed the place's tranquillity. Here and there he noticed items that he had brought back himself. Shelves were holding a hodgepodge of statuettes, weapons, skulls and other unusual objects... All this looked like a shambles. Yet to a trained eye each place was carefully organised and positioned according to the region the object had been found in. The mixed aspect was due to the multitude of peoples that had lived on the same lands over the ages. To researchers from Kallienne who were astonished by the lack of rigour of his classification, Larshaen simply answered with a smile that by separating them, one robbed the objects of their history. Mehöl could see the various fates that these findings bore witness to. His eye could detect the signs of intermingling and alliances, as well as the mixed influences that these everyday objects were proof of.

Missing from this place were the collected written works on the origins of the various peoples, which were kept in a wing of the grand library to allow scholars from all over Aarklash to consult them. Larshaen, who had been working on this task for the past 50 years, had earned the respect of his peers for the number of works that he had collected and translated. They therefore let him devote his time to his quest for objects, which many considered futile yet was tolerated in the University as an original way of understanding the various peoples.

His master's melodic voice interrupted Mehöl's thoughts.

"Are you ready to continue the *ënalërosÿn*?"

He placed a tray holding two steaming cups on the floor. The spicy scent of the starflower infusion quickly filled the alcove. Mehöl slowly sipped the hot drink, making the moment of peace last a bit longer. They had already been exploring the *ënalërosÿn*, the path of consciousness, for several hours. Mehöl was exhausted. He caressed the smooth face of his mask lying before him, which was connected to a crystal sphere by a wire. Larshaen's finely crafted mask was lying opposite him, also connected in the same way. In between them lay the crystalline mass of the *mne-molabrum*, a strange shell with dozens of sinuous folds coiled around anchorage points. Larshaen had rarely used the *ënalërosÿn* because mutual respect

THE HERITAGE OF THE ANCIENTS



and trust had created bonds between the master and his disciple that made using this artifice unnecessary. Yet Mehöl's revelations had convinced him to use it again. The careful examination of the latest events experienced by his disciple would allow the detailed analysis of the circumstances of his discovery. Mehöl made a slight sign of consent to his master before putting on his mask again.

"We were in the port of Kraken," said Larshaen.

The images came back, clear yet immaterial like in a dream. They were silent images to which Mehöl sometimes added comments or descriptions. He saw the worm-eaten pier again, the grey evening sky and the first lanterns that were being lit in the windows of the port's taverns. Then followed fleeting images of a sordid mass of precarious buildings and ruins. This unusual amassment, which was built on the remains of an ancient Cynwäll city, formed the floating quarter of Cadwallon.

"I went to visit Dalrum. I was exhausted, yet I had to get to Wyde without delay," commented Mehöl.

Several ships with patched-up sails appeared, one of them marked with a roughly painted boar's head. Two sailors with weather-worn faces were busy coiling up ropes. The image of the two men became clearer. Mehöl was on the ship. One of the two sailors, the smaller balding one, made a face at him and spoke.

"I asked them where their captain was... they didn't want to wake him up. They..." Mehöl's voice took on a hoarse tone. "We told you that the captain doesn't want any visitors. Rather put your head into a shark's mouth than bother him."

The other sailor, a native of Kel with a thick neck, came forward to push back the elf...

"Let's return to the storyline. Did you see the captain?"

Images quickly swept by and then the captain burst from the ship's cabin, giving a kick to the nearest sailor. He seemed to be half asleep, was swearing and rubbing his porcine eyes.

"He was mad at them. He shouted, 'Bunch of squid-brained hull rats! Can't you shut your traps when I'm sleeping! Or do I have to...'"

"Thanks for this presentation of the elegant language of Kraken's Cadwës. Did anything else happen?"

Mehöl concentrated harder.

"We negotiated the price of the crossing. He demanded a surcharge due to the urgency of our departure, which supposedly made him lose some business. This cost me 50 ducats."

Images went by of the captain haggling the price with his arms flailing. Larshaen leaned over to Mehöl.

"Gold is nothing. What you have brought back is priceless."

Larshaen suddenly tensed up. He saw a shadow that was following another. The first of these shapes came out of the darkness.

"There was this woman who looked us up and down as she walked by... She was following someone."

A face appeared, the face of a woman with an ice blue, disturbing gaze. At that moment Larshaen placed his hand on his adventurous disciple's forehead.

"Concentrate on this moment, on the instant that she appeared from the darkness."

Mehöl wound back his memory. His mind was searching the past.

"Dalrum was complaining, 'at this time the chain is lowered across the port's entrance. I risk having problems with the harbour master's office. Mustn't upset these people.' He stopped speaking. I turned around to see what he was following with his eyes. She was there, her hand tightly gripping the hilt of her sword. Behind her was a hooded figure that, before vanishing into the shadows, threw an incredibly cold glance at us. This made me feel uneasy. Excuse me for this lack of control, master."

"It doesn't matter," answered Larshaen with a soothing voice. "Don't torment yourself. In her you felt the influence of the shadow following her. Look."

For a moment the scholar took control of the flood of Mehöl's memories. He wound back the tumultuous course of time and stopped it on an image.

"There!"

The form seemed to be gliding on the pier and the image then froze to reveal a serpentine tongue flicking out from beneath the hood. Larshaen continued.

"Light protects you. Without knowing it, you bumped into an enemy far more dangerous than the Syhars you were telling me about earlier on. I wonder what could have brought this being to the City of Thieves," whispered Larshaen as if talking to himself.

His kind has been hiding for so long.

"But let's get back to your journey. Did you meet anyone else?"

Mehöl concentrated again. Fleeting images of the boat and of the stormy seas went by behind his closed eyes.

"No. Nothing important. We then had favourable winds and we were able to land south of the gulf of Syrlinh after three days of sailing. From there I followed the road to Aneirin."

Wyde. The image of the city dominated by the University's slender towers appeared before the two Cynwälls. The white stone buildings reflected the light of the afternoon sun.

Larshaen took off his mask, thus breaking off the contact with the mnemolabrum. He seemed to be worried. Mehöl rubbed his temples to relax and soothe his head. He lacked in experience in this exercise that was practised daily by other Cynwälls. His master got up, bent over him and felt the object that was implanted in the back of his neck.

"So you shelter the mind of a member of the Utopia, a guardian of legends." Everything went silent as he thoughtfully looked at Mehöl. "Can you show me the key that was entrusted to you?"

Mehöl undid his tunic and removed the bronze pendant that was hanging around his neck. Larshaen took it and went to a nearby table. He examined the object carefully with a magnifying glass.

"I have never seen anything like it until now."

Larshaen studied the notches. He could make out barely noticeable marks.

No inscription. In any case the craftsmanship confirms its origins.

Larshaen sighed.

"What have I gotten you into, Mehöl? I have shown myself to be irresponsible by sending you to explore this country on your own."

Mehöl also got up.

"But master, here we have a great discovery that clearly confirms the usefulness of your work on the origins of the solaris and the knowledge of the Utopians. In Kulden's visions I have seen wonderful creations, constructs that were able to move in the air and under the sea!"

"Yes, yes," answered Larshaen with a calming voice. "But I am measuring the weight of the secret that you are carrying inside your flesh."

A secret?

Mehöl no longer understood.

"This knowledge must be revealed and shared. It must be used to push back Darkness. We hold the key to some of the Sphinxes' creations in our hands."

Larshaen raised his hand to interrupt him.

"Watch what you're saying. It's true that we're in the basement and no one seems to be around, but I don't want to arouse the whole University." Larshaen went to the door, shut it, and returned to his pupil. "You must understand that the Truth, just like the brightest Light, can be blinding. I know that these words might be ill-perceived, but it's important to me that you realise the scope of what you are holding and the danger that now accompanies you. Ever since its exile, our people has been focused on understanding and harmony through Noesis, but we are now at a turning point in our history. You know that, since the battle of Kaiber, our Guide has decided to awaken ancient secrets. Many of our kind believe that we should leave this badly mastered knowledge in oblivion. They are partisans of the Alliance of Light and refuse to put themselves into the hands of 'relics,' as they say. In its great wisdom, the *allianwë* doesn't want to leave out any options in the struggle against Darkness, yet it remains very vigilant. Every discovery is carefully analysed and especially the *tribëns* devote themselves to this task. Sometimes, when required by caution, they are ordered to strict secrecy, even at the cost of a life." Larshaen remained silent for a moment. He looked at his dumbstruck pupil before continuing on in a lighter tone. "I have great trust in

the Guide's clear-sightedness. He has let me do my work, which many judged to be useless, and today still, thanks to you, we have advanced in our knowledge of ancient times. It's too bad that your guest is in a state of torpor; I would have liked to have a talk with him about many a subject." He got up and gently took Mehöl by the arm. "You're tired and I'm an old fool to leave you like this while I daydream. Let me lead you to your room. I'll take care of sending a message to the *Omjynsill* to ask for a meeting. Until then, sleep without fear in this haven of peace. Nevertheless erase the imprints of the past days left in your mask so that no one can see them without you knowing it."

Mehöl lay down all clothed on the rudimentary bed. He thought about his master's words while wondering about his warnings and hidden meanings. His people had made transparency a founding principle. The simple thought of secret manoeuvres within the Republic and that the intimacy of the memories held by the mask could be violated caused him great distress.

He was suddenly awakened by heavy knocks on the door. The tumult of the students couldn't be heard in the hallways yet. Mehöl got up, wiped his clothes and opened the door. An elf was waiting in front of it with a crested mask hanging at his belt. His armour crafted of metal and dark leather weakly reflected the light of the torches. He greeted Mehöl, his right hand held to his heart.

"I have flown a good part of the night to get you. I have been charged with bringing you as quickly as possible to a meeting with a representative of the *Omjynsill*. We must leave right away if you wish to be at this audience on time."

Taken aback, Mehöl looked at him for several moments.

"Fly? Are you saying that you came here on a dragon's back?"

The messenger answered with a hint of pride in his voice.

"With a dragon, yes. By the way, put on warm clothes, the air is icy cold up there."

Mehöl quickly gathered his belongings, wrapped himself in his heavy travel coat and followed the dragon-knight. While crossing his master's studying quarters he hoped to see him one last time before leaving, yet the place was deserted.

The two elves took a secondary staircase to reach the upper levels of the University and continued climbing to the observation deck around the top of the tower devoted to astronomy. An east wind was blowing, bringing with it the humid scent of the forest. Yllia was dominating a cloudless sky. Following his escort, Mehöl soon could make out a majestic form curled up on one of the terraces. He shook with excitement. For the first time he was going to straddle

one of the Cynwälls' powerful allies. As they got nearer, the impressive creature got up. It stretched its neck toward them. Its scales caused small white sparks as they rubbed against the floor. With its head turned sideways, a huge eye opened up in front of Mehöl's face. The elf froze, fascinated by the purplish colour of the iris in which particles of light were floating. A low voice accompanied by a warm breath surrounded him.

"Ēryar Maloth salutes you, young elf. May Light guide your steps." The reptilian head moved back a few metres, its nostrils trembling with a burst of dry air. "Greetings also to the envoy of the sages," continued the dragon. "I can sense him sleeping in you. It is strange that his essence is mixed with yours, but I can feel his imprint."

Mehöl felt the back of his neck become warm and a silent answer filled his mind: Kulden salutes you, son of Maloth. The dragon gazed at him for a few more moments, then turned around and bent his hind legs to let the riders get onto his back. Tightly gripping the leather pommel between him and the dragon-knight, Mehöl watched the landscape flying by beneath them. His mask allowed him to make out the details below despite the darkness. The biting cold could be felt through his clothes, but the dragon's body radiated a comforting warmth. Astonished, Mehöl let this magical moment sink into his memory.

The first rays of dawn were appearing on the horizon when they came into view of Laroq, whose bare summit rose to a dizzying height. Ēryar Maloth turned left and began his descent toward the first foothills where small buildings could be seen. A few moments later the dragon landed on a narrow ledge while stirring up a cloud of dust.

As soon as his passenger had gotten off, the dragon left again with a powerful beat of his wings. Mehöl found himself standing in front of an opening that led into the depths of the rock. Inside, an equanime welcomed him in a small room with a hot bowl of *nadech* and some wheat patties. He then silently led him through a maze of roughly hewn tunnels that contrasted with the usual Cynwäll style of architecture. Here and there, sprouts of *hysneh* glowed with a soft light.

The monk vanished when they entered a hall that was filled with darkness. At its centre stood a column of light coming from an opening in the vault that let a draught of cold air rush in.

An unknown voice then rose from the shadows.

"Come nearer, Mehöl. Get into the light. It will make your words clearer and will cause the Truth to spring forth."

Slightly disoriented, Mehöl sat down facing an elf wearing a simple toga. The immaculate whiteness of his clothes announced his being a Noesian. As his eyes grew accustomed to the lighting, he could tell that he was surrounded by bare-chested equanimes

sitting on their knees and oblivious to the icy cold. The Noesian smiled at him and opened his arms as a sign of greeting.

"My name is Ylnir."

A deep voice was then heard behind Mehöl.

"Larshaen has sent an urgent message to the *Omjynsill* containing troubling information. Our Guide has deemed it useful to hear you without delay, but there are many tasks that demand his attention. He has therefore charged Ylnir to assist in this meeting and to faithfully report your words back to him."

After a pause, another drier voice could be heard to his left.

"Why do you think that you were chosen to transmit the knowledge of the Sphinx? Do you believe that you are a new envoy for our people?"

"I'm not a sage nor a prophet. Chance led me on the path to that sanctuary and to the secret held inside it. Only Light knows if I was guided to this place."

"What is your place in our people? Why do you travel to such distant lands?"

Mehöl remembered his master's long discussions in which he explained his work. He tried to transmit their spirit as well as he could.

"We do everything we can to gather new knowledge on the origins of the peoples that have walked on Aarklash. Understanding their roots often allows better comprehension of what animates them today."

Barely had he finished his sentence when another voice spoke.

"Are you aware, seeker, of the weight that is now borne by your shoulders? You who sought knowledge, do you measure the restraints on freedom that it can represent?"

Mehöl shuddered and then mastered himself, slowly inhaling.

"Like every researcher, I have always hoped to make a major discovery. But I know that what I have brought back from the sanctuary has forever changed my destiny by binding me to..." He hesitated, looked for the right words, not sure of what he could reveal over here. Ylnir nodded, inviting him to continue. "I know that I am bound to the mind sleeping inside of me and to its knowledge."

"Doesn't the idea of simply being a receptacle holding a precious item revolt you?"

Mehöl felt his cheeks become slightly red. Despite the *shenras*, he had never been very good at hiding his emotions. He answered with an air of defiance.

"Yes, I admit it. I was very angry! Who wouldn't be at the thought of being 'inhabited' by another mind. Yet I have accepted it, not as a trial, but as a chance for our people. This guardian is the key to awakening many ancient creations."

The Noesian raised a hand to signal that the interview was over. For several minutes only the sound of the wind disturbed the silence in this place. The equanimes, remaining perfectly motionless, kept serene faces while Mehöl awaited the decision of his peers. Finally, Ylnir spoke.

"We have listened to your words and have probed your heart, Mehöl, disciple of Larshaen, seeker of the vestiges of Wyde. You have inherited a great secret, yet in you there is strong resolve. With the help of Light you will know to use wisely what has been entrusted to you. However, take care to keep your free will. The mind of the Sphinx is strong. One last thing: the guardian you bear makes you a container. You must protect him like your most precious belonging, for many will desire him. You must understand that our decisions concerning him will apply without your fate being taken into consideration. For the good of our people and of the Ways of Light, we will judge his usefulness and maybe it will be decided that it's best to let him rest in secret while waiting for the right moment. Now we will awaken the guardian and listen to his message."

Ylnir placed his hands together and one by one the equanimes came to salute him before leaving the room. A heliast then came in. His mask was covered with metallic protrusions that continued down onto his chest. He bowed before the Noesian and then turned to Mehöl.

"I am Anhareg, weaver of light of the workshop of Laroq. I will awaken the mind of the Sphinx by feeding the immortal gem that gives him his essence."

The heliast concentrated while placing his hand on Mehöl's implant. The gems on his mask started glowing stronger and stronger. His hand stiffened and he began reciting an incantation while concentrating to guide the influx of mana. Mehöl felt the tingling get stronger while the energy passed through his skin to fill the gem of Light embedded in the flesh of the back of his neck. Finally the heliast moved back. His gems, except for two of them, had lost their shine. He took off his mask and wiped several drops of sweat from his brow.

"This gem holds great power. To regenerate its essence I nearly broke my immortals." He wrinkled his eyebrows, listening to a voice that only he could hear, and then continued speaking quietly. "He is already awake."

A familiar voice rang inside Mehöl's mind: *Thank you for having brought me to your kind. With your permission I will express myself through you. This will demand less of an effort and you will be my voice, not simply a bearer.* Mehöl agreed, amused by the irony of all the consideration he was being shown. He was aware of the importance of this moment. He wanted to inform the assembly that he was going to bring them Kulden's words, but he cleared his throat and the Sphinx's voice filled the room.

"I am Kulden, guardian of the legends of the Utopia.

I have been charged by my people to transmit our knowledge to those who bear the Light in Creation. I must speak to your chief, the Guide."

"Our Guide is not a chief," Ylnir corrected him. "He gives light to our footsteps and to our consciousness. He is in the Light and we follow his teachings. He has decided to devote himself to the struggle against the Darkness that is swallowing up Aarklash. It's in his name that I welcome you and listen to you."

Mehöl felt the back of his neck get warmer and understood that Kulden was probing Ylnir's mind. A fleeting smile appeared on the Noesian's impassive face.

"Your mind is resolute and you know how to pro-



tect its limits. I will reveal a secret to you of which Mehöl is the bearer. While awakening I felt the familiar air of the Dragon Mountains. The rock around us confirms this. You occupy one of these refuges. Is its revelation chamber still operational?"

On hearing these last words the heliast became flustered. He looked at Ylnir who gave him a sign to go ahead.

"Yes. Three of them are still operational in Cynwäll lands. We carefully guard their secret. If we have brought you over here, it's because we hope that the object described in the message is one of their keys." Ylnir looked deep into Mehöl's eyes to speak to the young elf's mind. "You're young and already tried by these changes. Revealing this secret to you would seal your fate. Then you would no longer be able to remain a simple seeker. If you wish, you can still keep your freedom. We can take care of leading the mind to this place."

Kulden answered. Mehöl's voice took on an angry tone.

"I have caused my host to undergo terrible trials. He had to fight to bring me all the way to you. In these times of spreading Darkness, blinding and ignorance are only the fragile ramparts of fearful minds. He has the right to know for what he has risked his life... I want to know where my footsteps lead me, I don't want to be a simple receptacle!"

Ylnir looked at him for a moment with tenderness, then got up and motioned him to follow the heliast.

"Very well, Mehöl. You will discover one of the creations of the Sphinx animated by solaris."

They continued on their way, going deeper and deeper into the innards of the mountain. Anhareg was leading the way, his toga glowing with light that was pushing back the darkness. He guided them through three doors sealed with the luminous stranglehold. The corridor then finally widened.

The elves reached a hall whose walls and ceiling were covered with panels of bronze. A rectangular pool filled half of the hall. It held several centimetres of clear water. Anhareg opened his arms.

The wall across from the entrance caught Mehöl's attention. It was holding up a huge metal frame holding various crystals, gears, metal plates and other unidentified objects. The whole thing was protected by two thick panes of glass. Kulden's voice rang in his head: *The reading plate. It requires the key that you are carrying, which will reveal the information.*

"Anhareg, put it in its place," said Kulden out loud.

The weaver of light obeyed. He manoeuvred a set of chains and pulleys that were embedded in the wall to move the heavy frame above the pool and then turned to Mehöl.

"If you care to give me the key..."

Mehöl removed the pendant from around his neck and gave it to him. Anhareg carefully inserted it into a diaphragm of dark metal. A slight creaking could be heard as the mechanism tightened around the key's contours.

The heliast spoke an incantation. An intense glow came from the pool and shone through the luminous frame. A sparkling shine lit up the ceiling as if bursting from a kaleidoscope. A couple of clicks were heard while complicated mechanisms were being put into place inside the frame. Finally a series of images were reflected, causing the heliast to gasp in stupor. On the ceiling's smooth surface there were now colourful reflections representing a map that Mehöl recognised to be the southern part of the Behemoth Mountains. Other images were being projected onto the walls.

The elves all silently walked around the pool to study the images. A whole wall was covered with a detailed map of a vast complex. Many inscriptions could be seen on it. Mehöl got nearer, subconsciously ran his finger along them and realised that he understood them: they explained the mechanisms of the main gates and how to switch on the forges' energy matrices. Ylnir the Noesian and Anhareg the heliast were standing in front of another wall as if petrified. When he reached them, Mehöl understood the reason for their stupor: an incredibly realistic reflection showed a huge cavern in which humanoid forms were

lined up in long rows by the hundreds, maybe even thousands. Anhareg cleared his throat while holding his hand out to the unbelievable vision.

"Constructs... This place must be..."

"A great workshop of the Utopia!" Kulden's words had burst from Mehöl's mouth, completing the mage's thoughts. "Before our people left this Realm to carry on its struggle against the ophidian brood, it had done lots of work and research. This place holds the secrets and the means to create and assemble constructs of all types. I haven't known it because when I was put into stasis this place was still only a project. The goal of these edifices, which were built in hidden places, was to one day pass our knowledge on to our successors. This day has come."

"I will inform the Omjynsill as quickly as possible of this major revelation. Until then, it's best that..." He looked for the right words for several moments. "That you get some calm, rest and meditation. Mehöl, you really need to take the time to find your equilibrium again thanks to *shenras*. This place is perfect for you to do so. You will be informed as soon as a decision has been made."

"Hurry up. This laboratory holds secrets that could very well be desired by many. I can guide you to the heart of the workshop, but don't lose any more time. Light won't tolerate a lukewarm response when the clamour of war rises!" added Kulden fiercely.

Ylnir answered calmly.

"You are thanked for your advice. Yet it is now up to us to weigh the consequences of this discovery. I must now leave you without further delay."

The Noesian left the hall and the heliast deactivated the machines. While leading Mehöl through the maze of corridors, Anhareg questioned him eagerly about what was held in the workshop. Yet Kulden remained silent.

Once he was alone in a small room of the monastery, Mehöl gazed pensively at the wind-beaten landscape of Laroq. He was stunned, divided between the excitement of the discovery of a workshop filled with ancient secrets and the awareness of the dangers they would have to confront to reach them. Climbing up the mountains to reach a complex buried beneath the ice and located between the accursed lands of Acheron and the forest of Ashinân would be a dangerous journey.

Have no fear. I understand your worries, but I'll make sure that we stay alive. I have trouble comprehending your people's reluctance. We will go to this place and awaken it, no matter the costs.

Far from comforting Mehöl, these words only dismayed him even more. He was inhabited by such an intransigent being. Kulden barely seemed to approve of the Cynwälls' giving so much careful thought.

Mehöl sat down and placed his hands on the floor, opening his mind to lose himself in the communion with the soothing solidity of the stone...



The next morning great agitation filled the University's upper levels. Since several hours the Guide was present, escorted by his cortege of *tribëns* and warriors who watched over his person. Several dignitaries had already met with him and now it was a heliast's turn. He saluted the equanimes posted in the hallway as he went to one of the doors without hesitating and softly knocked on it.

"Come in, Anhareg."

The weaver of light entered the room and bowed deeply, his head bare.

"Come closer, my friend. There's only you and I over here..."

In front of him was an elf dressed in a simple white robe. Sitting at a desk, he raised his eyes from a huge pile of documents. His grey eyes brightened an ageless, soft-featured face. Anhareg was standing before the Omjynsill, the Guide, the heart of the Cynwäll nation.

"Have a seat and explain me your view of things. I have already seen Larshaen and have had a long talk with Ylnir. I'd like to hear a different point of view on what the Ancient has revealed to us."

"This workshop is the opportunity for us to understand many objects that we keep hidden. I hope that it will allow us to build or to improve some of the constructs that we only maintain for now as good as we can. And what's much more important is that far in

the back of the hall filled with hundreds of construct warriors that we were shown in the revelation room, there were several forms in the shadows. I'm almost sure that these were *cianhydrons*, these colossal creations from the age of legends. Even if we had only one of these..."

The Guide stared at him.

"You know, Anhareg, that we have one. You also know that we have renounced using it after it killed as many of our own as it did our enemies when the heliasts lost control of it. We must advance carefully in the knowledge of our heritage, for we have already paid a heavy price due to ignorance." The Omjynsill reflectively rubbed his forehead before continuing. "I'm convinced that our people must relentlessly keep up the struggle against Darkness. During the battle of Kaïber I have glimpsed one of our possible futures. Syd, who was bearing inside him the mixed influences of our people and of the Ancients, led the Alliance of Light to victory. Now another fruit of the union between these two influences has come to us, including knowledge that we thought forever lost. I know the path, yet I must prepare our people and show it this new way... I thank you, Anhareg. Would you like to add anything?"

The heliast bowed.

"I'd be honoured to be part of those who will travel to this sanctuary, should you decide to have it explored."

The Guide smiled.

"You know so many secrets yet your curiosity is as strong as ever. To me you almost seem to be an initiate heliast again. But there is no doubt that an experienced weaver of light will be needed for such an expedition. Go now, for I must prepare the summoning of the *allianwë*."

Anhareg left silently while the Guide wrote several notes that the *tribëns* would deliver to all the Noesian masters of Lanever. He would know to convince the assembly to follow him on the path that he has decided to take. There would be some dissent, maybe even clashes, but the Noesians work for the good of the Cynwälls. They would know to set aside their differences. Just like Light can have endless different shades in its unique shine, different opinions all lead to the same resolute battle against Darkness. It was up to the Omjynsill to know to keep his people united and avoid the scars of a new *cynwë*.

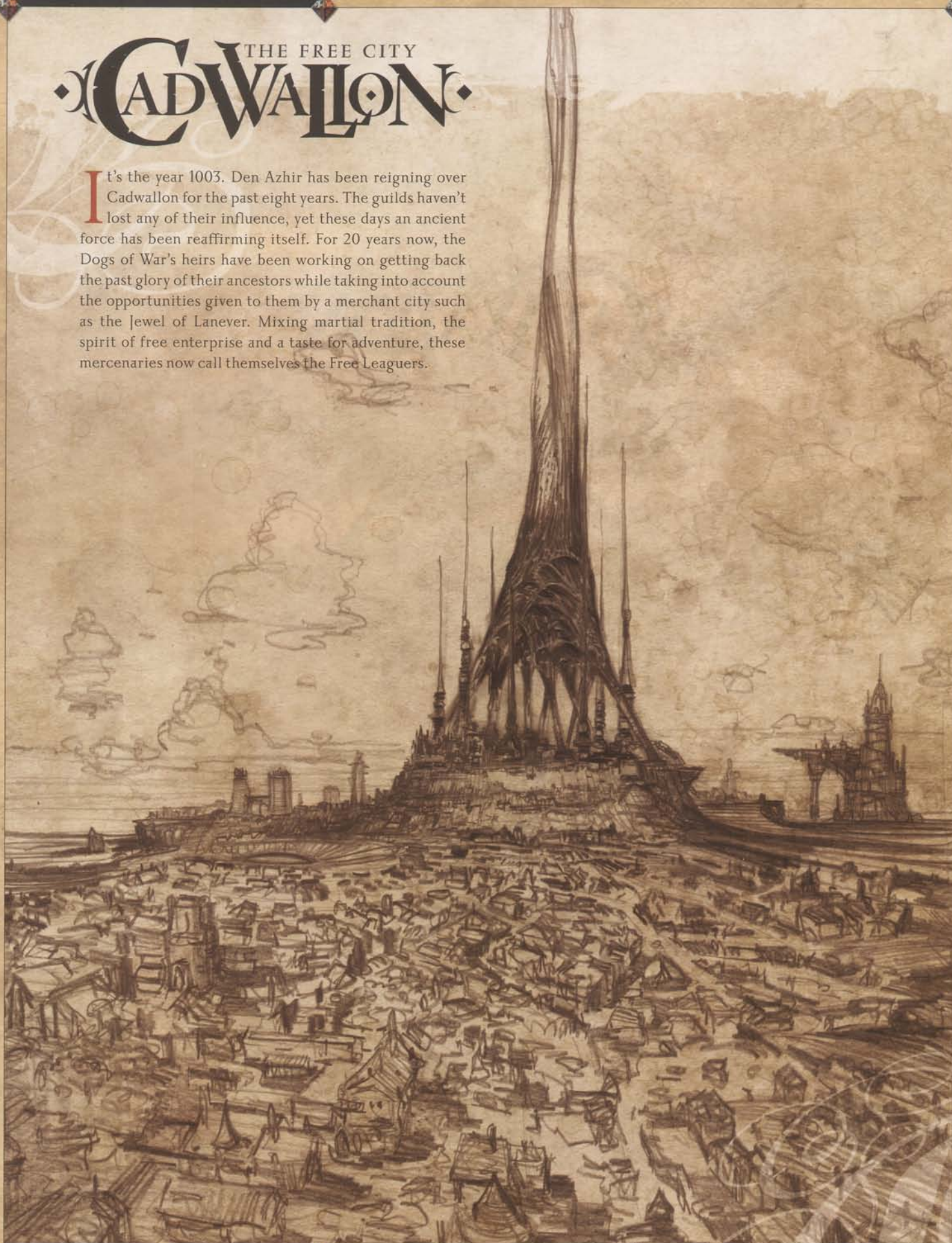
The Guide thought for a moment before calling the equanime guarding his door. His decision was taken, but he feared the price that his people would have to pay.

THE FREE CITY
CADWALLON

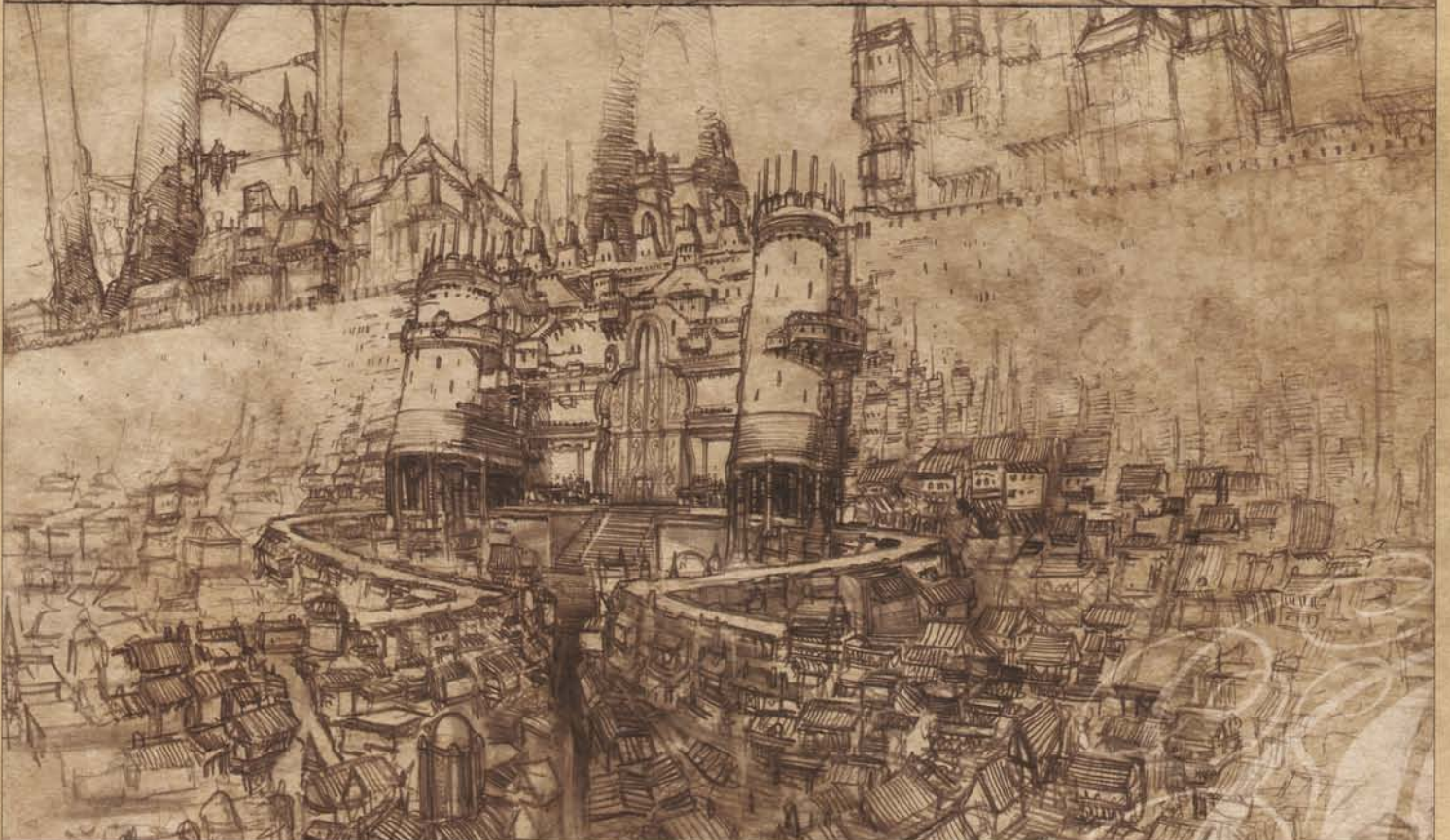
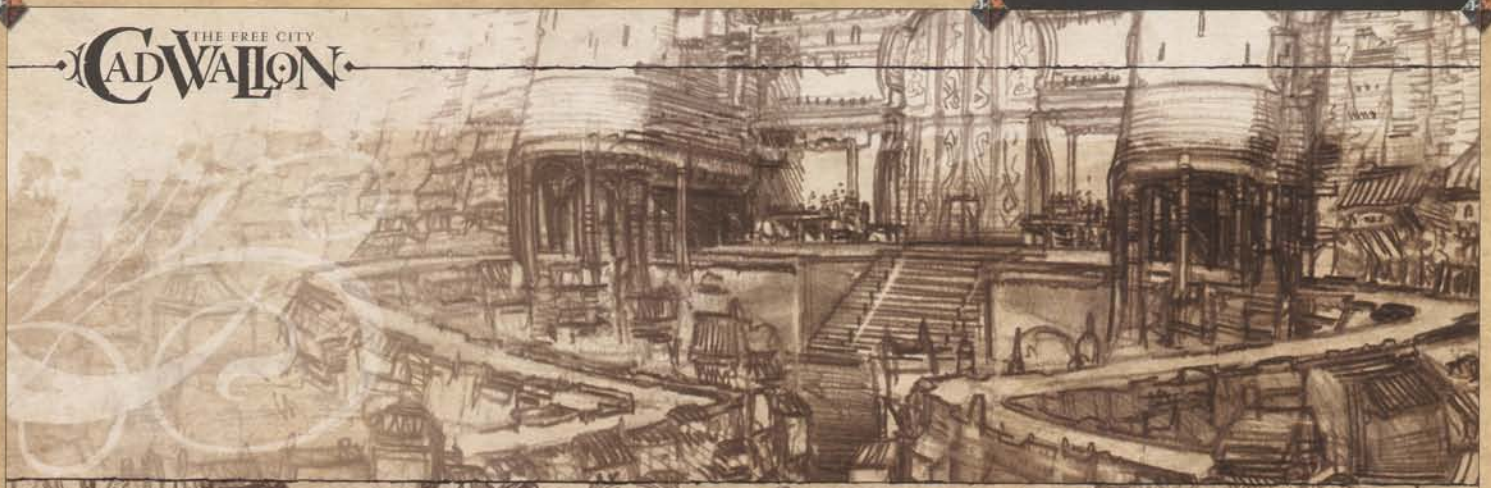


THE FREE CITY CADWALLON

It's the year 1003. Den Azhir has been reigning over Cadwallon for the past eight years. The guilds haven't lost any of their influence, yet these days an ancient force has been reaffirming itself. For 20 years now, the Dogs of War's heirs have been working on getting back the past glory of their ancestors while taking into account the opportunities given to them by a merchant city such as the Jewel of Lanever. Mixing martial tradition, the spirit of free enterprise and a taste for adventure, these mercenaries now call themselves the Free Leaguers.

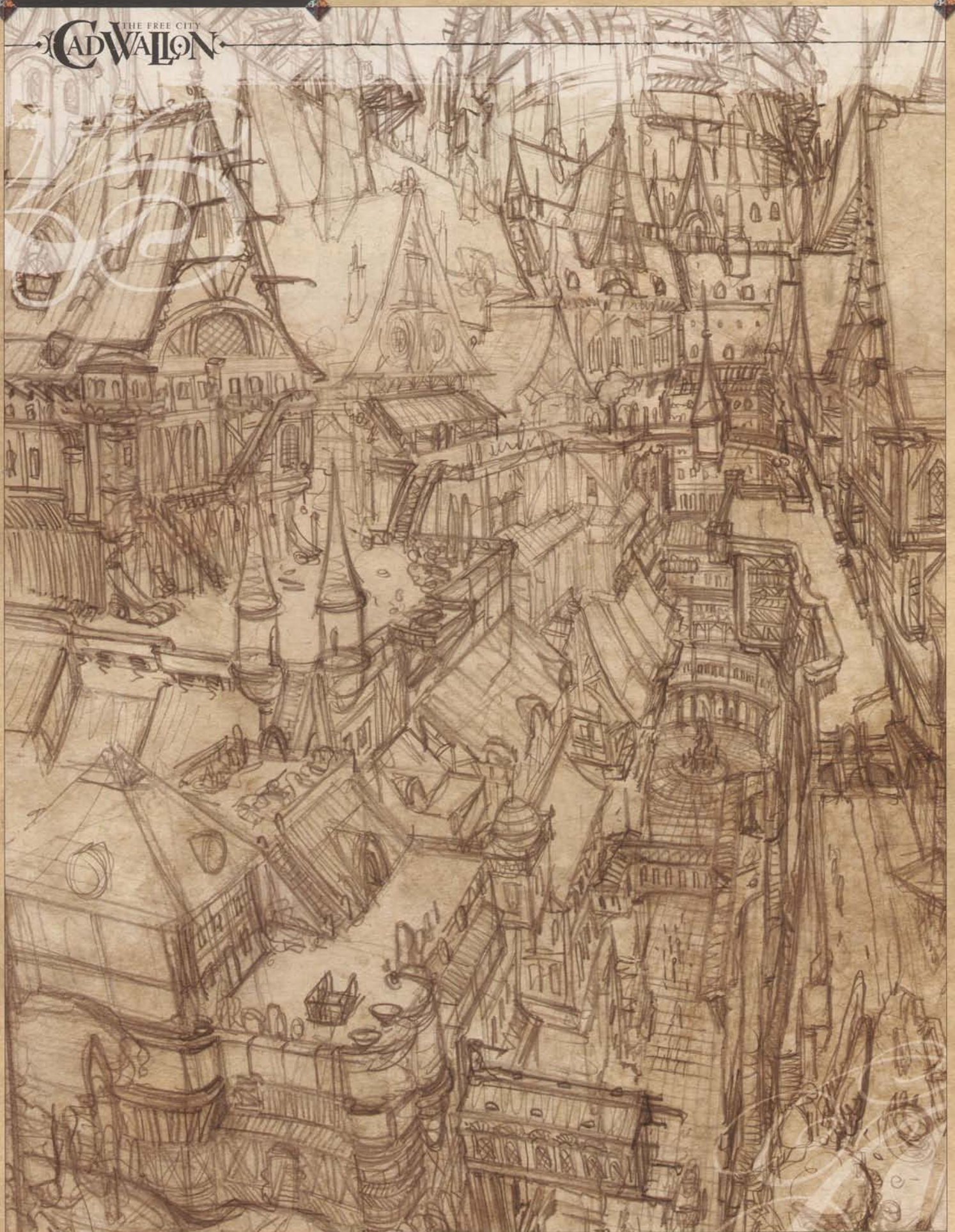


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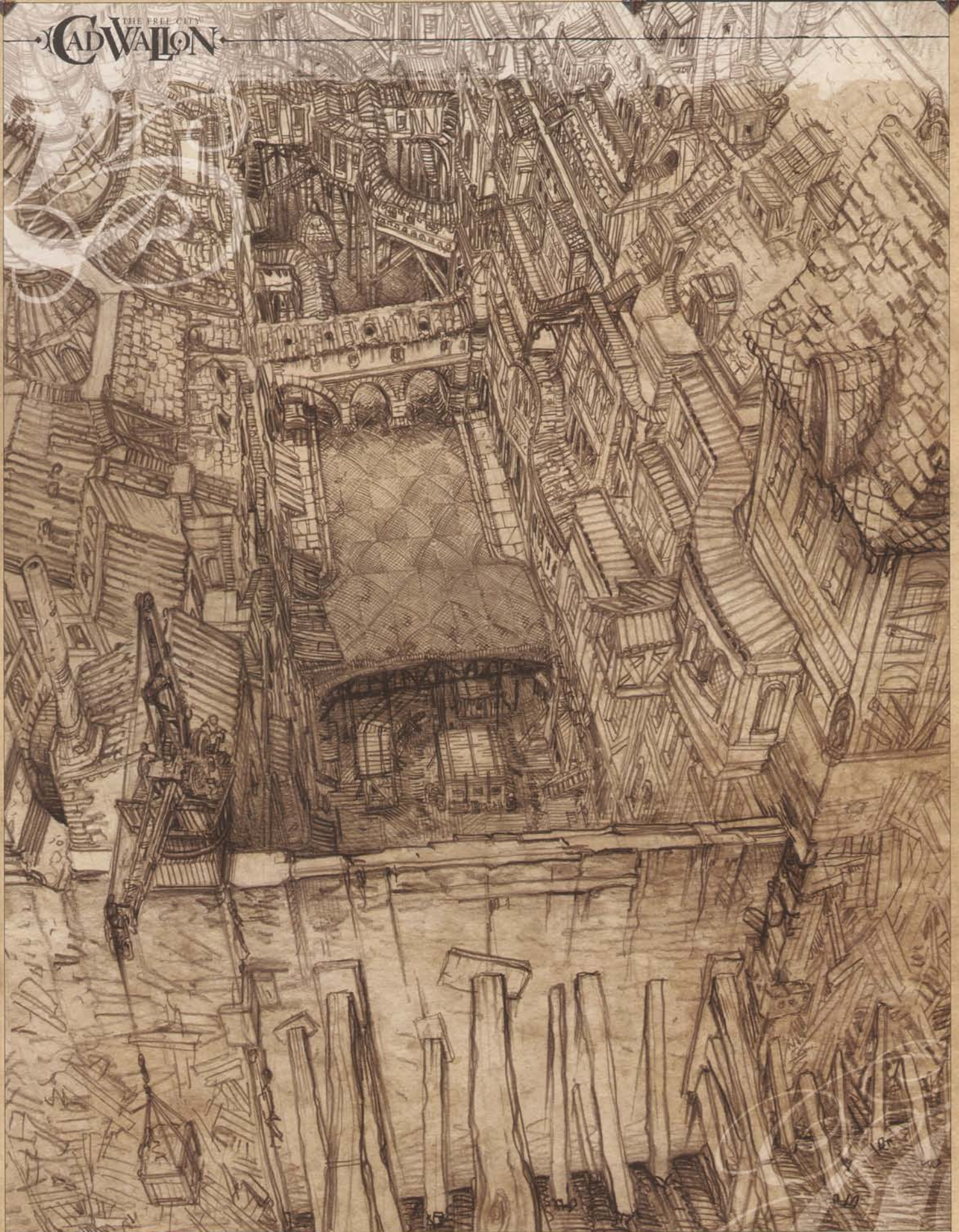
The lower city

THE FREE CITY
CADWALLON



The upper city

THE FREE CITY
CADDWALLON



Morgue Street

THE FREE CITY
CADWALLON

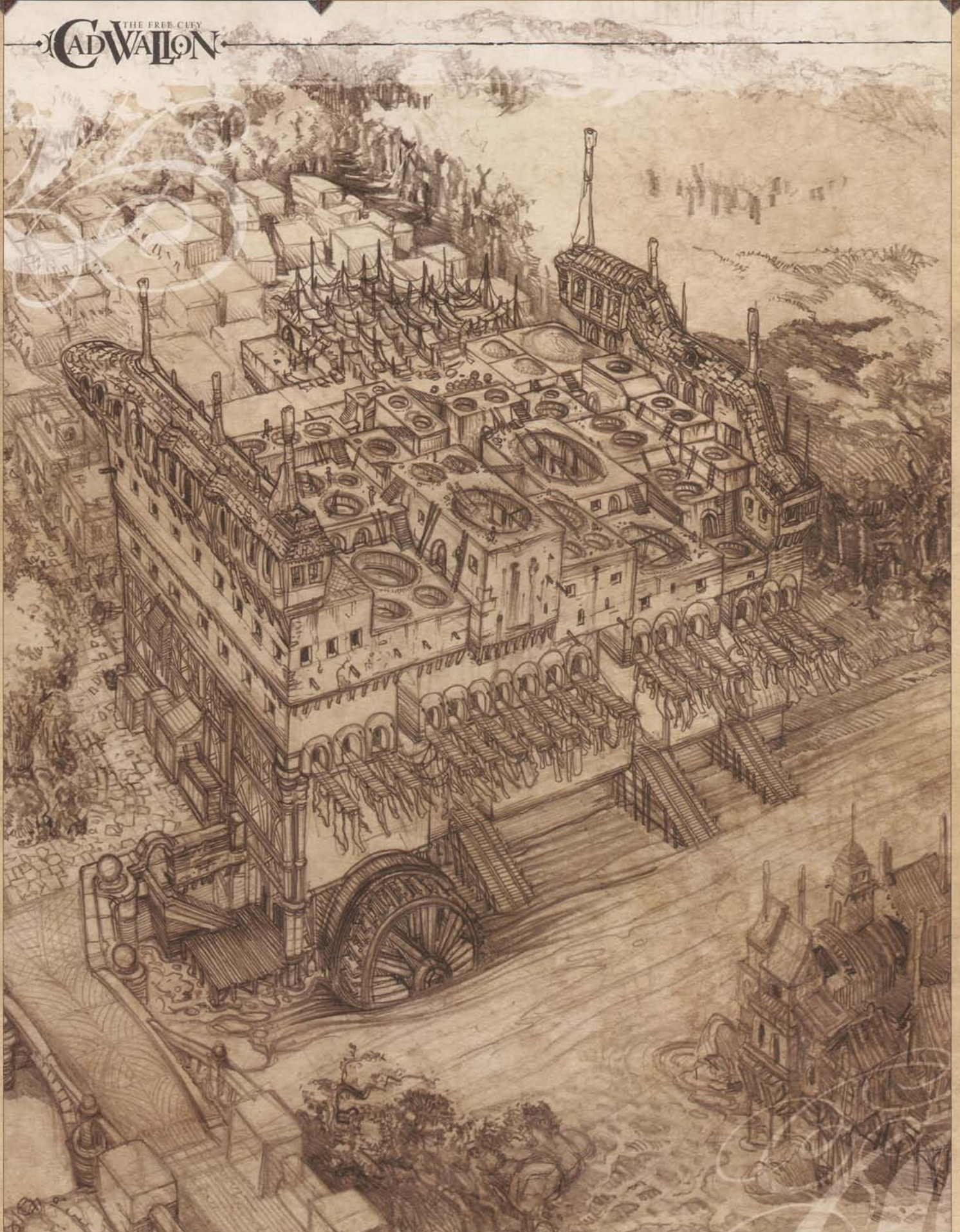


Ancient Cynwäll buildings

THE FREE CITY
CADWALLON



Goblins. Dwarves. Two cultures,
 two architectural styles.



The tanners' quarter

THE FREE CITY
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The school of magic

THE FREE CITY
CADWALLON



The port of the Water Sprite





THE CHRONICLES OF THE WORLD OF RACKHAM
DRY
HAYLIC! 