

Aventurian Herald

Aventurian Herald 175

Political News: Guardian of the Circle Declares Convocation of the Church of Efferd

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Regional News: Straw Puppet Parade Divides Festum City Council

Festum. As the 8th of Phex approaches in chilly Festum, tempers are heating up. The Grand Council is quarreling, and Councilwoman Firnski plans to lead the Atmaskottjen Parade through the middle of town to honor Rondra and a Bornish dignitary named Linjan of Elenau.

Panorama: Big Game Hunt in Uthuria

Belhanka. According to rumors, certain interests in Kuslik plan to exhibit a tame “*escaladir*” in the zoo, alongside other Uthurian beasts. This giant monster resembles a fanged cow with a horned ridge. Caspar Khoramsfright, famous beast hunter and questador, reveals what he’s learned.



Aventurian Herald; Efferd 1040 FB

The Prince of Uthuria is Here!

BELHANKA. Prince Anajo I of the people of the Owangi and the realm of the Tapiwakpa, son of King Anwa-ti and Queen Kaliru, envoy of Uthuria to the colony Nova Methumisa, was welcomed to the harbor of Belhanka with great fanfare. With the words, “*We feel honored to be at the service of the glorious eagle tribe, much endowed by Nandus, and ad finalem to explore its blessed Terra Cognita and civilization,*” the young prince stepped onto the dock. His arrival was accompanied by cheers that were at first a bit sparse but then increased quickly. This historical occasion marks the first Uthurian visit to Aventurian shores.

Prince Anajo I arrived on the caravel Prince Sirlan, which has made numerous voyages to Uthuria across the Fire Sea at the behest of the Imperial Aventurian Company (I.A.C.). This time, the hold contained not just exotic goods like jade, coffee, and gold, but also crates filled with the prince’s personal wardrobe and also gifts from his homeland, for those he plans to visit during his travels. He handed the first such gift to Pervalia ya Tehrdilion, First Admiral of the town and Primesta of the Republic of Belhanka, who was waiting to welcome him at the pier. She received a precious statue of white jade with a human body and an eagle’s head. It depicts the lord of the gods, called “Pra-Jobo” by Anajo’s people. “*This White Horas,*” Prince Anajo said, “*shall be a confirmation of the factum that the Uthurian people of the Owangi and the Aventurian eagle tribe will fraternize in a cultural and spiritual way.*”

The Prince and the Admiral then

addressed the crowd to explain how this new friendship will benefit both realms. There were many words praising the peaceful gifts of colonialism for both sides. Belhanka benefits like no other town in the Horasian Empire from the influx of precious colonial wares, wonderful customs, and myriad stories from the southern continent. The Owongi will benefit from the progress that the Horasian Empire can deliver. Citizens cheered the visiting dignitary until he was carried off in a specially-crafted carriage to attend the next appointment in his crowded schedule.

But why is Prince Anajo visiting the Horasian Empire? He intends to travel the land for a whole month to experience our culture firsthand and spread it among his own people. Accompanying him is a patrician from Methumis named Lessandro ya Strozza, lord of the aforementioned I.A.C. and the Banking House ya Strozza. With his own eyes, Anajo will learn and see what the future holds for his tribe now that they are allies with the Horasian Empire. He will meet with nobles and other dignitaries, both mundane and clerical, and will even meet the Horas himself in the Palace Sangreal in Horasia. Prince Anajo’s schedule consists of many private meetings with important people. We do not know will be discussed behind these closed doors. What political meaning this visit entails for the Horasian Empire and its colony at Nova Methumisa remains to be seen. Surely Khadan-Horas knows (in his flowery way of speaking, Prince Anajo refers to Khadan-Horas as “Superb Son of the Golden Coat”)



as, no doubt, do Khadan-Horas’ court and advisers, Prince Anajo I himself, and Amero ya Vespatis, governor of the colony of Nova Methumisa. What is certain is that the people hold the Southern Sea colonialism of the Horasian Empire in well regard.

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Arela Weißblatt (Dominic Hladek)

The Voice of the People: The Prince

What a beautiful man! Ah, to be young again and to go to Uthuria, to be saved from the grasp of a giant ape...

—Cebanne Darow, manufactory worker from Simiavilla

It fills me with patriotic pride. Our glorious realm has made an alliance with brave followers of Praios who live deep in the jungle, and together will now shine the light of civilization on all blasphemies and machinations of the Nameless One! I will do my part and buy shares in the next voyage scheduled by the I.A.C. We must stand up to Al'Anfa's blasphemies and imperialism, and show them who holds dominance in the colonies. It is a fact that the

interests of the Horasian Empire will be defended in Uthuria! Long live Anajo I, Prince of Uthuria! Long live Khadan-Horas!

—Solates Fock, Horasian patriot

Where else but here in Belhanka could one such as myself speak this aloud, but this caricature of a prince, stuffed into his fine threads like a wheel of head cheese, is no more than a marionette being

paraded about to drum up business for the I.A.C.! The Uthurians are a proud, independent people, and it is a real shame that their chieftain's son has become a compliant slave of the narrow-minded nobles. It is outrageous that this is being celebrated here, in Belhanka, where citizens have freed themselves from the chains of the nobility!

—anonymous student from Methumis

Aventurian Herald, Efferd 1039 FB

Guardian of the Circle Declares Convocation of the Church of Efferd

BETHANA/VINSALT/AL'ANFA. For months, the hidden conflict smoldering in the Church of Efferd has been threatening to erupt into a conflagration. In the apolitical Church of the god of the ocean, the discussion about an additional Master of the Surf has become quite the political issue. The Church of the Lord of the Tides is in danger of driving a wedge between its various communities. Many observers and believers looked to Bethana with hope, but the Guardian of the Circle remained tight-lipped (probably to avoid the inevitable accusation that he favored one side over the other in this argument). Even demands by the head of the Church for congregants to refrain from quarrelling and avoid casting insults in public (as reported in the *Aventurian Herald*) went unheeded among some members of the clergy. There is no other way to interpret the words Efferdan ui Bennain delivered in a recent divine service. "Every river needs tributaries, that its life-giving water shall not run dry. But," ui Bennain continued, "a river

should not branch too often, lest it lose itself among lesser streams and creeks."

At the end of his sermon, the venerable Guardian of the Circle revealed a great surprise. In the month of Hesinde, he will travel with a delegation to Brabak, where the Master of the Surge South Sea will lead him on an inspection of the temple. "I hope that I will meet with the High Blessed One of Al'Anfa and with representatives of the Horasian Church of Efferd," the Guardian said. He then asked all Blessed Ones to journey to Brabak to join in the discussion about the future of the Church.

What he meant regarding the future of the Church, he did not say, as it please Boron. If it comes to pass, this will be the first convocation in the history of the Church of Efferd that brings together Blessed Ones from all over Aventuria, including the estranged congregations in Al'Anfa and the Horasian Empire.

*Muliro Larekos
(Martin Schmidt)*

Aventurian Herald, Efferd 1039 FB

Brabakan Spring Awakening

NAGRA. This kingdom by the cape has existed for over two centuries, but at times it seems almost brand new. To the burghers of Brabak certainly it has always existed, though to be honest, nobody beyond its borders ever felt that the kingdom was very important. This has been changing in recent years, as if the kingdom is waking from a deep sleep, like a beast coming out of hibernation.

It all began in the year 1035 FB when the Brabakan flotilla set sail on a secret mission. This was the same year that the Crown gave permission to a very old Brabakan family to build a wharf and create a trading company called the Brabakan Amalgamated Occidental Company, or BAOC, for short.

The new company's ships sailed first to Gyldenland, a symbolic voyage honoring the many Gyldenland travelers who had already made the round trip voyage successfully. But while foreign traders and lords blinked their eyes in surprise at the fleet's bravery (or smiled secretly at its foolishness), the BAOC managed to establish a kontor here in Nagra.

Two years later, even the Northland Bank had found its way to the royal city. That same year, the trading company's ships finally returned from Gyldenland laden with goods for Brabak. The Crown soon issued the *Codex Mizirion*, a set of laws for the entire kingdom, including the Risso Archipelago, which had grown increasingly important (almost every trade route used by free traders and the BAOC to reach Uthuria leads through the archipelago). Today, Brabak maintains a thriving colony, Porto Sancta Elida, in Uthuria. Trade with the remote southern continent is now the topic of conversation on everyone's minds, and not just in the royal capital but also here in

Nagra. Countless goods, such as lumber, jewels, plant saplings, and wild animals, find their way to the markets of Brabak. Apart from the BAOC, many free traders also try their luck on the dangerous passage. The Horasian Empire is investing in southern trade as well, and is even building a harbor fortress in Nagra. This decisive move is predicted to create an advantage in the struggles with the empire's eternal rival, Al'Anfa, and also serve as a springboard for passengers on their way to the Horasian colony of Nova Methumisa.

It might feel like a prophecy, but Brabak seems to be casting its gaze increasingly towards the southern continent and the riches that it can provide through trade. The future king, Prince Peleiston, shows no sign of diverting from his father's plans; if anything, it seems as if the Crown Prince's convictions have only strengthened. Time, the province of Satinav, will tell if Brabak can prove itself the equal of the Horasian Empire and Al'Anfa. When it comes to exporting the Aventurian spirit to Uthuria, Brabak's prospects look pretty good, at least as far as proud Brabakans and many foreign observers are concerned. Thus, developments here by the cape indicate that Brabak's spring awakening will continue for the foreseeable future.

*Nandurio, Blessed One of Nandus in Nagra
(Christian Bender)*

Aventurian Herald, Tsa 1038 FB

"This is going too far!" – Straw Puppet Parade Divides Festum City Council

FESTUM. As the 8th of Phex approaches in chilly Festum, tempers are heating up. The Grand Council is quarreling, and Councilwoman Firnski plans to lead the Atmaskottjen Parade through the middle of town to honor Rondra and a Bornish dignitary named Linjan of Elenau. ntil today, the parade had been restricted to the Warehouse Island, meaning that the infamous Thorwal Drum (symbol of the bravery of Festum's city guards, and main attraction of the parade), which was made from the skin of the evil pirate, Atmaskot Blood-drinker, did not incite any larger conflicts. But now, Domain Master Gernot of Halsingen, along with other long-time residents of Festum, has sided with the councilwoman. Guard Captain Elkman Timpiski, especially, is of the opinion that the parade route should be extended to cross the Toll Bridge and enter the Old City. Those opposed to the plan include many followers of Hesinde, merchants both small and large, and even



retired Magister Alwin K. Nodwinger, himself a council member and former spokesman of the Festum Council of Arts. They fear that dangerous protests might erupt during the parade, aimed not only at careless Thorwalers, but also at Norbards, goblins, and Maraskans, all of whom enjoy burghers' rights and privileges in Festum. The Grand Council will vote on the matter soon. Those in the know think the vote will be close, even though the traditionalists hold a majority. The atmosphere in the city is already tense, and people who have experienced Festum's cosmopolitan flair will be surprised by the growing feelings of animosity towards "wretched immigrants" on the one hand, and "narrow-minded saber-rattlers" on the other. We hope, for the quarrelsome council members' sakes, that they will make a wise decision, but surely not everyone will be happy with the outcome.

*Alriksej Gerberow
(Daniel Heßler)*

Fantholi, Efferd 1038 FB

The Countess of Bearforest Adopts a Daughter of Noble Lineage

BEARFOREST COUNTY, EFFERD 1038 FB: Our editors were shocked recently when a grim Weiden knight dashed into the writing room of the *Herald* to hand us a dispatch from the Countess of Bearforest. It seems that the corpse of a messenger sent forth on a delivery many months ago was found near Leinhouse. Phex be praised that his murderer didn't find the report he was carrying. We now present that report here, in its entirety.

County Bearforest, 10th of Hesinde 1037 FB: It has been barely four months since the cowardly attempt on the life of Walderia of Lionshead, Countess of Bearforest (as reported in AH 168) at the Bowyers' Celebration in Olat. Now the aged Countess has made the following announcement. In a solemn ceremony, she adopted a young knight as her daughter—a rare act among nobles—thus founding a new line of succession for the County of Bearforest, with the consent of the Duke.

The celebratory tournament was held in the peaceful fishing village of Olat. Firun had already clad the fields, meadows, and forests by the Mistmoor in winter snow. The black walls of the Countess' fortress rose like a dark figure from the ominous, fog-en shrouded waters of the Nine-Eye Lake. The bitter cold prevented all but a small crowd of chosen guests from arriving to honor the future Countess. Representing the Duke's family was Walderia's brother, Prince Walthard, her grandniece, Princess

Walbirg, and Shieldcount Kerling of Lionshead, Master of the Greencoats and former Master of the Knights of the Grove. Many famous heroes from the counties of Weiden proved their skill in the tournament, which also served as a readiness test for the campaign against Haffax. Attendees were especially moved when Master Eisewyn and Yolanda of Fallowfield sang a duet dedicated to the memory of Count Waldmar, Walderia's brother. Geiserich of Haffstone, the disputed Steward of Comital Pallingen, was noticeably absent from the celebration, reinforcing the rumors of his envy and resentment towards the young heiress, who descends from old Bearforest nobility. It is a shame that no proof of his involvement in the assassination plot has been discovered. Divine service was held to honor Firun and Rondra, according to long-standing tradition, after which Ivrain ni Catholainn, the Pro-Legate of the Church of Firun, presented Ifirn's blessing to the young, charismatic heiress. The Countess chose the 10th of Hesinde for the adoption because it was also Griseldis' 27th Tsa Day. During her speech, she referred to the outrageous assassination attempt from four months ago: "As my life was taken and returned on my Tsa's Day, so shall today signify the beginning of your new life. Rise, Griseldis of Pallingen, bound forever to me as daughter." All present were touched to see the normally strict and reserved ruler overcome by maternal emotions.

Thuronia Kupferstich (Axel Riegert)

Khunchom Harbor Post, Phex 1038 FB

Hilbert of Hartsteen: the Fall of a Garetian Noble

KHUNCHOM. Banishment from the Middenrealm to the hot Lands of the Tulamydes seems to rob a person of both sanity and decency. One sad example is Hilbert of Hartsteen, former Palsgrave of Broadgrove, who was convicted on charges of corruption and abuse of authority. From his exile in Khunchom, Hilbert claims to know of a conspiracy that threatens the Imperial Throne and involves the Empress' husband, Rondrigan Paligan.

Hilbert, a Garetian by birth, is willing to share his sketchy theories with Middenrealmish travelers for the cost of a glass of abszinto, and eagerly welcomes them into his new home, a sleazy, harbor-side brothel. According to Hilbert, the twelve-times cursed traitor, Helme Haffax, is a mere puppet of the Imperial Crown, whose skills are overblown and who poses no real threat to the Middenrealm. Hilbert continues by stating that the fear of the former Imperial Arch-Marshal was created artificially to bind the realm's vassals to the Throne and stop the lords of the various provinces from claiming the rights they earned through the Oxblood Charter, such as the right to exercise sovereignty over their provincial troops.

If you think that Hartsteen's political horror stories can't get any funnier, read on. He also says that the *Aventurian Herald*, a blatant mouthpiece of the Imperial Crown, played an important role in this conspiracy. For example, he points out that the *Herald* raised no critical voice about the marriage of the Empress to a servant with an unsuitable pedigree. According to the bitter Garetian noble's account of events, the *Herald* referred to the marriage between a captain of the fleet and a scion of an unimportant Al'Anfan grandee family as "an event to be celebrated," and points out that the *Herald* devoted more space to a description of the bridal gown than to the terms of the new alliance. The final straw for the former Knight of the Realm

was the *Herald's* depiction of Rohaja of Gareth as the "heroic Empress."

He saves his worst accusations for last, and directs them against the Imperial spouse. Allegedly, by employing a vast network of agents who refer to each other as "heroes," the Imperial Privy Counselor spies on subjects, including even those whom the Crown names as close allies, in order to eliminate his own political enemies. This secret network's most prominent victim to date was none other than Imperial Arch-Chancellor Hartuwal Gorwin of the Great River, whose murder by cultists of the Nameless One was actually a cleverly staged diversion. In reality, Hilbert believes, Rondrigan Paligan had the Duke of the Morthmarches killed because he was among the strongest supporters of the Oxblood Charter, and his death strengthens the Crown's hold over the nobles of the Middenrealm.

Hilbert's confused ramblings might be outlandish and without substance, but they show that some long-established Garetian nobles pay more attention to rumors than they should.

Charef ibn Saiman (Jürgen Suberg)

Editor's Note: If you find yourself stirred to action by Hilbert of Hartsteen's paranoid claims and absurd stories, just visit this Khunchom Harbor tavern and visit the disgraced Knight of the Realm for yourself. Witness the wasted human potential and the questionable rotgut that qualifies as liquor on this part of the continent. I can only hope that Hilbert of Hartsteen commits himself to the Noionites' care, and soon.

*(Baltram of Liepenberg, for the
Aventurian Herald)
(Carolina Möbis)s)*

Aventurian Herald, Rahja 1039 FB

Mourning in Perricum

PERRICUM. Even though we are glad of the outcome, the successful completion of the campaign of good Empress Rohaja of Gareth against Mendena cost the lives of many brave heroes.

One of the most important nobles to fall during the campaign was the highly decorated Colonel Wallbrord of Lionshead-Berg, Baron of Perricum. This long-serving officer and former Marshal of the Dukedom of Weiden led the troops of his Margravate in the charge against Mendena. Those who served closely with the colonel during that final battle say that he caught an arrow in the chest and fell while rallying his troops for the final strike at the heart of the city.

The dying man transferred command to his son, a captain in Lord Wallbrord's own regiment, who had been fighting nearby when the colonel was wounded. His duty fulfilled, the great man, a member of the proud and glorious houses of Lionshead and Berg, breathed his last in the arms of his son. The new commander collected himself quickly, gathered the troops with his courage, skill, and determination, and pushed the enemy towards the harbor with a brave attack.

Upon learning of these events, the Empress summoned the valiant captain to the palace. As he kneeled before her, she offered her condolences and proclaimed his father's death a terrible loss for realm and province. Then, in recognition of his deeds, she dismissed the charges of a crime which had been leveled against him several months ago. The deceased Baron's title passed to his illegitimate daughter, Elissa, to the general surprise of his subjects.

*Xandros Fernel
(Marcus Friedrich)*

Kuslikan Courier, Travia 1038 FB

Terror at the Harvest Celebration

HORASIAN EMPIRE. On the 1st of Travia, His Honored Majesty Baronet Efferdan Wavestone announced a Harvest Festival pleasing unto the Benign Mother, to be held at his hunting chateau, north of Grangor. Invitees included young and old from the surrounding area, as well as the brave heroes who defended the way station at Dawfield one month ago. To ensure the safety of his guests, the Baronet rode out to investigate rumors of marauding robbers in the nearby forest and thus wasn't present for the festivities.

No doubt Wavestone's absence is what attracted an evil creature to the festival. It is believed that a vampire gained entrance to the chateau by concealing itself among the servants. Once it revealed itself, a magical barrier prevented those present from leaving the area, and no outside help could gain access. To further its evil ends, the vampire summoned walking dead that took up weapons from the hall and assaulted the terrified guests.

Early on the morning of the 2nd of Travia, bodies from the Boron yard were found defiled in the forest. Later it was discovered that the local shrine of Efferd had been desecrated, and all water supplies, including nearby bodies of water, had been poisoned. The surviving guests then steeled themselves for a second night of attacks from the vampire and his undead servants. On the third day of their captivity, and despite suffering from terrible thirst, the guests and servants managed (with the help of Phex and Efferd) to drive away the nameless terror and break the spell.

The *Aventurian Herald* mourns the brave heroes who lost their lives fighting against the undead. We also salute guard Beppo Sator who dutifully stood his ground and gave his life. Aslam, mercenary captain from the Lands of the Tulamydes, died a hero's death holding off the undead creatures so that others could escape, and the beloved bard Helmut left Dere with a final, beautiful song on his spinet.

In their memory, and for the protection of future generations, a shrine of Praios was built, consecrated, and devoted to the holy Horas in front of the hunting chateau. The ceremony took place on the 3rd of Travia.

*Jette Alessa Ravenguard and Hesindion Machandel
(Janina und Marcus Robben)*

Belhankan Watcher, Efferd 1040 FB

Route and Itinerary for the Prince of Uthuria

BELHANKA. The *Belhankan Watcher* has obtained further information about the Prince's planned travel route and destinations. From what they have been able to learn, Imperial advisors have scheduled Prince Anajo's itinerary almost down to the minute. His Excellency will travel nearly 300 miles through the northern Horasian Empire in a specially-built carriage provided by the Imperial Kuslikan Coach Manufactory. His visit will culminate in a meeting with His Horas-Imperial Majesty Khadan-Horas, Emperor of the Horasian Empire and King of the Dulcet Fields and the Southern Sea.

Here we present those details of his journey which have been released to the public.

Day 1-3: Belhanka

- ☞ Ceremony marking the arrival of Prince Sirlan, amid cheers from the crowd
- ☞ Welcoming speech by *Pervalia ya Tehrdilion*, Primesta of the Republic of Belhanka and First Admiral of the city
- ☞ Address the people of the Horasian Empire
- ☞ Reception at Rahja's Palace on Dere in Belhanka, organized by the Guardian of the Cup, *Gylvana von Belhanka*
- ☞ Visit the *Oro Nero*, the first coffee house in the Horasian Empire, in the Penumbra neighborhood, to relax with an Uthurian drink

Day 4-8: Methumis

- ☞ By request of the Prince, a fitting with a tailor from Dröl
- ☞ Personal meeting with *Duke Eolan IV*, Berlinghan, a benefactor and supporter of the I.A.C.
- ☞ Walk the Colorful Walls
- ☞ Visit Duke Eolan University and give a lecture on Uthurian derography for students of the Efferd School

Day 9-10: Silas

- ☞ Reception with the Priorium of the Guild Masters of Silas
- ☞ Tour the dwarven neighborhood of Simiamada. Visit several goldsmiths and tour an exhibition of masterpieces created by the jewelers and smiths.
- ☞ Tour the Lizard Gardens

Day 11: Sibur

Events in Arivor necessitated last-minute changes to this part of the route. The planned visit to Arivor to meet with the Arch-Ruler Nepolemo ya Torese and tour the Saladanian smithies has been cancelled. Instead, the Prince will journey through Sibur, where the governor has promised to illuminate the Prince on the town's famous silver industry.

Day 12-21: Vinsalt

- Many scheduled receptions and celebrations. High points include:
- ☞ Visit to the Vinsalt Opera for the premier of the play, *Uthurica*
- ☞ As requested by the Prince, private lessons in rhetoric at the Academia Horasiana
- ☞ Masquerade Ball at Castle Baliiri

Day 22-26: Horasia

- ☞ Imperial Reception, with the Praetorians serving as Honor Guard
- ☞ Visit the Temple of Praios Sancti Ucuriani
- ☞ Tour the Palace Sangreal
- ☞ vening of conversation with Khadan-Horas

Day 27-30: Kuslik

- ☞ Meeting with the Magister of *Magisters Aldare Firdayon* in the Halls of Wisdom
- ☞ Reception with the Kuslikan Notables
- ☞ Return to Uthuria, sailing from the harbor in Curonia

*Quido Berylli
(Dominic Hladek)*

Belhankan Watcher, Efford 1040 FB

Big Game Hunt in Uthuria

BELHANKA. Among the passengers disembarking from the *Prince Sirtan* was an adventurer from remote Baliho named Caspar Khoramsfright, a famous beast hunter and questador who has spent the past few years in Uthuria hunting big game in the jungle. It is not hard to picture him. Imagine a rough, muscular body and a chiseled and unshaven mercenary's face with a nose broken so often that it resembles a leaning watchtower built in a swamp. Then imagine an unpleasant yet strangely alluring smell of musk with a hint of resin and tobacco. Finally, dress this image in the snug-fitting leather hide of an Uthurian jungle lizard, add a necklace of predator's teeth that would make a Bornland bear jealous, and you have Caspar. The daring traveler arrived with many large crates and cages in tow, destined for the Kusliker zoo. When I asked him about their contents, he would say only "beasts." It took a further 30 minutes of questioning to worm some more information out of him.

According to rumors, certain interests in Kuslik plan to exhibit a tame "escaladir" in the zoo, alongside other Uthurian beasts. This giant monster resembles a fanged cow with a horned ridge. Caspar attracts an audience even when he isn't sitting among his peers in a tavern in Belhamèr (the Sailors' Quarter, where we conducted this interview), and he punctuates his tales with loud exclamations and cracks of his Baliho cattle whip. Since the hour was growing late, I asked him to summarize his thrilling report of the hunt.

I always say, the farther away the land, the bigger the prey. Believe me, Uthuria is so far away that a forest elephant is but a pup compared to an Uthurian beast. One day I enter the jungle, even though it is so hot you won't send your dog outside. After three hours, I think "What a waste, this day."

But then I see a beast, no joke, large as a witch's hut in Weiden, but much scarier. I keep a cool head (I like to tell myself that, but in reality I'm terrified) and I think "Sneak a little closer. It is just a big cow." Well, in reality it is more like a bull from the Netherhells. Not a real demon, of course, but with more teeth in its jaws than a damned Ifirn shark. And as I get closer, I see that the thing is so big I hurt my neck looking up at it. Honest, its neck starts two feet above my head. And the fur was... Well, let's call it blood-black. And the beast stinks! Something like a cow, but one that has been dead longer than a salted Thorwalian cod at the end of winter. Lucky my nose is so crooked—I can barely smell anything. Then BAM! It suddenly goes crazy and begins to run! I think, I am being quiet, so what spooked it? And then I think to myself, fine, let it run away. But no, it runs TOWARDS me, as if Hell's Sultan himself was sitting on its neck, guiding it. And you know what? There was something on its neck. I ran like hell, which is why I am still alive. I know when to run and when to attack. This time, I run. And I run and run and meet a family of Jucumaqh, savages that live on the southern continent. They are skilled fighters, beat you to a pulp with their clubs. But I know one of them, and lucky he recognizes me, so I don't get beaten up. Instead we have a smoke by the fire.

My Jucumaqh friend tells me about the creature. He says these beasts are really quite peaceful, except during mating season. But there are these parasites, Kalladir or something like that, a type of blood worm. They use their jaws to clamp onto the necks of these peaceful giant cows, and then they suck blood and inject a poison that makes the cows insane. The Jucs call it an escaladir, which means "peaceless." Yes, the very same label Thorwalers use for their craziest pirates. Fitting, isn't it? And I saw such a thing on this cow's neck. So I ask: "Say I

remove the worm from the neck, does the beast become tame like a priest of Tsa on Rohal's Day?" The Jucumaqh says he doesn't know what a priest of Tsa is, and if what I'm asking is will the beast then grow as calm as a kerelo-monkey after the hour of Rahja (I call it that here in Belhanka; he used other words), then yes, that is what happens. "Well," I say, "then I will remove the worm." You should have seen their faces. The warriors were all whispering, and their eyes... My knees begin to shake when I see their eyes. They are brave jungle warriors, but they are terrified of getting too close to an escaladir. Of course you are afraid now, I say to myself, but said is said, and said is done, which is why I'm in Uthuria, right?

The next day I think to myself, maybe you will find it asleep and things will be easy. Of course, when I find it, it's awake. Would have been strange if luck had been on my side for once. So I hold my nose and approach it from downwind, which makes the smell of the beast even worse. But this time I am quiet and get very close. I have my throwing knife with me, the one I used to knock a silver coin from a coachman's hand back in Baliho. Hopefully I haven't lost my edge, I think to myself. Then I stand up and throw. And hit! Man, I think, what a lucky day! Now, "hit" doesn't mean "dead." The worm is still on its throat, but at least the beast is distracted. So I move even closer.

Now, if you think I am going to say that I climb up and throw myself on its neck, you are quite stupid. You can go try something like that, but I want to live a little while longer. I take my spear, stand off a bit from the beast, and stab. I am quite good at aiming, and by the eighth or ninth stab, BAM! I hit. My spear pierces the worm. It twitches on the tip like a pike drawn from the water, but I ram the spear into the ground, draw my knife... What, boy, you there, in the last row, yes, you. Take a look, when I say knife, I mean this one. Yes, a damn

machete, as you say it. So I draw my machete, which I call "Fernlove." You know, ferns? So I draw it and hack the worm to pieces. The peaceless cow doesn't become peaceful all at once, of course, since the poison is still in his blood. So I roll to the side, I don't want to be crushed. I run away and wait. After a while, the beast settles down and goes back to grazing as if nothing had happened. Believe it or not, I throw my lasso around its neck and lead it back like a cow from the pasture.

He has become a good friend, this beast. I name him "Birsel the Escaladir," after my favorite cow from the time I worked for the cattle barons. Well, I called her Birsel the Cow, "Birsel" for short, not escaladir, of course. And tomorrow we go to Kuslik or whatsitsname, where the beast goes to the Zoolobota... Zoologa... Zoologa... to the zoo. It's a pity, I really like him.

What, you ask if the worms are contagious? Haven't even thought about it. But no, if they were, I would have met somebody who caught something, back in Uthuria. People don't catch worms. Does a worm grow back? No, I can't imagine they do, or it would have already happened to Birsel on the ship during our journey home.

Quido Berylli
(Dominic Hladek)

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