



BORDERLAND PROVINCES

Players Guide

By Matthew J. Finch



FROG GOD
GAMES



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The Borderland Provinces

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Listen. For it whispers on all sides, like the sounding of water upon the rocks.

Watch. For it leaves its mark upon the face of the waters.

Consider. For there is much hidden below the quiet of still surfaces.

Prepare. For the tide of civilization stirs itself, and moves.

—Interpretation of the oracle of the teeth of the dead, conducted by the Priests of Jamboor in the Great Reliquary, in accordance with the Twenty-seventh Cipher of the god, in the year 3509 of the Imperial Record.

The Borderland Provinces

The Scholar's Tale

*Being the account of one Huillem the Scholar,
originally of the City of Aix in Aachen Province*

Dear Diary,

I shall set down the journal of my travels in this blue, leather-bound notebook that I purchased from a bookbinder in the vicinity of the High Mercha Hill in the great metropolis of Vermis, capital of Aachen Province, to record my notes about the wondrous places I shall pass through on my journey through the Borderland Provinces. These are the lands to the east of the March of Mountains, bordered on the west by the mountains and on the east by those unhappy regions known colloquially as the Sundered Kingdoms. The eastern border is said to be made up of the Forlorn Mountains and the Trader's Way Road.

These lands are a vast sweep of more than two thousand miles from north to south, with four main geographical areas that I have researched in the university's library. These are, from north to south, the River Valley of the Great Amrin River (which I can see from the room of my inn!), then farther south the watershed of the massive Gaelon River. To the south of the vast basin that feeds the Gaelon River, the Plains of Suilley run like a high band between the Gaelon Valley and the southernmost geographical feature of the Provinces, the lake-rich hills between the March of Mountains and the Forlorn Mountains.

All these lands are rich with the history of the ancient Hyperborean invasion of Akados, and were once, most of them, covered by the expanse of the Great Akadonian Forest. Great bands of primordial forest still blanket most of the land, broken with scatterings of towns, villages, roads, and castles. Having dwelled all my life within the cities, I look forward to seeing these charming rural places and the dramatic scenery they inhabit. I travel in company with a Foerdewaith baron by the name of Rolande, and his newly hired manservant Vodric.

Aachen Province

The Scholar's Tale

Aachen Province is perhaps the best-settled and peaceful of the provinces beyond the March of Mountains. It remains a loyal province of the



Kingdom of Foere, its Lord-Governor sent directly from the Overking's Court in the city of Courghais. The current Lord-Governor is a grim and no doubt skillful administrator by the name of Theriven the Leopard, an acclaimed military commander.

The City of Aix

The Scholar's Tale

The city of Aix is known here as the Gateway to Foere, which is an accurate title since all of Aachen Province's high roads come together in the middle of the city itself. It is a prosperous place of some eight or nine thousand souls, funded by trade and friendly to foreigners. As my companion Baron Rolande discovered, there is a tax upon items brought into the city for sale, although the gate tax itself is minimal.

First, I should mention that I made the acquaintance of Vodric, a quiet commoner who has apparently traveled widely, while we were waiting beyond the city gates to proceed with the rest of our caravan northward upon the Royal Vermis Road to the capital city of Vermis. Vodric had come to the city via the Estuary Road that connects Aix to the bustling seaport of Eastgate far to the east. His tale was fascinating, and I set it down here. Shortly after hearing the tale, two of the city guards arrived at the city gates, frog-marching Baron Rolande between them. He tells us that his legs are sometimes weak, which is why the guardsmen supported him, and why he must ride in the wagon rather than walk. He is one of my first encounters with true nobility, and one thing I have learned is that nobles are quite sharp of tongue. At the gates, the guards were quite clumsy when they released him, accidentally pushing him past the city's threshold, and he verbally chastised them with spicy language and gestures as he hobbled to join the rest of the caravan.

Estuary Road

The Commoner's Tale

Letter written by Vodric, a commoner

In Eastgate, I was hired by some Aachenlander merchants to join their caravan as a drover, leading the oxen and a couple of great-oxen. On our way west, between the city and the borders of Aachen, we saw patrols of cavalry and roadside inns close enough for us to stop by night and quarter the horses and the merchants. Once we passed into Aachen Province, I have to say that things changed, though. There were only a few patrols,

and we passed by a number of abandoned inns along the way. I don't mean to say it was abandoned, though, master scholar, just that it seemed emptier than the Eastgate area. Not as many travelers on the road, if you get my meaning. A bit run down, somehow, like people didn't care as much as they used to. Still, it's a stone-paved high road, and that's quicker than cart trails any day of the week.

City of Vermis

The Scholar's Tale

Vermis is a wondrous city said to have a population of some thirty-two thousand people, an almost unthinkable large metropolis. Its Hyperborean-era walls encompass two great hills, the High Mercha and the Grolldhill, where stands the great citadel of Vermis Grolld. Towers stand at intervals along the outer wall, flying the banners of Foere and the city's own flag of a black dragon on a yellow background. These walls are pierced at three gates, for the Royal Vermis Road meets the Wain Road here.

The city is a river port with a busy harbor shielded by the city's hills. I observed most of the boats to be keelboats with a single sail, one deck, and a shallow draft, all of them flying the black dragon flag, which keeps river-pirates away. The Baron and I are staying at a very nice inn, for the university is paying for my accommodation, and I was pleased to allow Baron Rolande to share the quarters. He has hired Vodric as a manservant and porter, so we were able to find accommodations for that good fellow in the common dormitory with others of his social status. We have had the good fortune to join a caravan from Bard's Gate to Carterscroft, which is in the Province of Eastreach, and we leave on the morrow!

Eastreach Province

The Scholar's Tale

Eastreach Province, like Aachen Province, remains loyal to the Overking, and is ruled by a Lord-Governor appointed by the Court of Courghais. The western part of the province, through which we are passing, is almost as well populated as Aachen Province. I have read that it is filled with an amazingly complex system of feudal estates, quite disorganized because they were taken by force when Foere brought civilization here. The east is wild and scarcely settled, filled with perilous places, including Rappan Athuk, the terrifying Dungeon of Graves.

I had a delightful conversation with one of the Bard's Gate merchants, a member of the Wheelwrights Guild in that city by the name of Derleoth Gat. The Wheelwrights ensure that travel is safe and orderly, regulating most overland commerce out of Bard's Gate in exchange for nominal fees. Their influence must be considerable, for the merchants seem in awe of Derleoth, keeping a respectful distance and avoiding his eye.

Wain Road

The Wheelwright's Tale

Coded Letter from Steev Tormis to the Wheelwrights Guild in Bard's Gate

Some Aachenlander scholar has attached himself to me like a leech, and I cannot get rid of him. He has been so occupied with asking me questions about wonders that he hasn't noticed robber knights stopping farmers along the way to shake them down for taxes, even though it is supposed to be a hanging offense on this road. We aren't stopped because we pay stupendous bribes to the Lord-Governor, and anyone obstructing

Bard's Gate trade is sure to end up with his head on a pike by the road. We've passed a couple of them along the way, heads rotting on the staves. Everything is for sale in Eastreach; you can buy loyalty cheaper than apples, and it lasts just as long. For us, the road is safe, and the Lord-Governor gets rich on it while his appointment lasts. Every noble wants a piece of the pie, and we can buy them with crusts. The Aachenlanders try to get it by taxing us, so for the most part we just pay the Lord-Governor not to stop our riverboats and we go right around Aachen Province. Like this little scholar, they have no idea that's why their trade is slowing and their roads are emptying out for bandits and beasts. Still, they're holding together better than Eastreach. You can't travel off the high road here without every little baron and knight charging you a "tariff" to go through his three miles of land. If it weren't for us, these country bumpkins would be eating their own trying to collect bribes from each other. The baron's manservant is the only one who seems to notice what's really happening on the road. He has a sharp eye, and I saw him reading through some papers the master had in his saddlebags. Interesting fellow if he can read. I'll offer him some employment if we lose anyone — or if I have to break some legs to collect our share from any of the merchants.

City of Carterscroft

The Noble's Tale

At last we've reached Carterscroft! No more rural inns along the high road. I think I have lice. Carterscroft is not a particularly impressive city, I must say, even though it offers me the potential for salvation. My manservant Vodric has virtually disappeared into the city, where he seems to have a number of friends. Huillem the Scholar natters on. A population of eleven thousand. Dates back to a Hyperborean trading town. Arguments between the priests of noble Archeillus and the do-gooders of the Church of Thyr. Priesthood of Muir has left the city and threatened an interdict. Justice supposedly for sale. Of course justice is for sale: That's why I'm here. I have bribed an official or two, and have an audience tomorrow with the court of the Lord-Governor to have my sentence, issued in Foere, commuted. For a highly reasonable price, too. That's efficiency. And efficiency is why the Kingdoms of Foere dominate the continent of Akados. Just take a look at the Unclaimed Lands to the north beyond the Great Amrin River. That's what a land looks like without a full system of nobility.

The Unclaimed Lands

The Commoner's Tale

I will no doubt arrive in the Duchy just as fast as this letter would if sent, so I will deliver it into your hands myself. I had originally planned to take a keelboat from Vermis to gauge the degree of river piracy along the Great Amrin, particularly on the Glimmri Run, where Eastreach's refusal to adequately patrol the river is apparently causing dangerous increases in piracy there. However, I stumbled upon a nobleman, an exile from Foere stripped of his lands, who draws attention to himself wherever he goes. His self-important antics make everyone around him essentially invisible, so I attached myself to him for the duration of his travels. From what I hear in Carterscroft, the general situation in the Unclaimed Lands remains the same. It is a sparsely populated region ruled by scattered feudal lords of the worst type, their tyranny and rapaciousness unchecked by any higher nobility. Their petty wars and river piracy, coupled with a harsh system of serfdom that varies little from slavery, continue to keep the area nothing more than an annoyance to the surrounding areas. I see no military threat from the region at this time, either to Eastreach Province or to the lands controlled by Bard's Gate. As usual, our caravan was an operation run by the Wheelwrights Guild. The caravan master failed to recognize me, but spotted me going through the "Baron's" papers. Since my nobleman appears to be finishing up his business here, I have met up with a cleric of Muir who is departing the city after delivering a threatening letter to the Lord-Governor from her temple, complaining of greed and injustice.

Amrin Estuary

The Cleric's Tale

*Letter from Isobel Ironfaith,
Cleric of Muir, to the Church of Muir*

Your Reverence, I write to inform you that my mission is completed by the grace of the goddess, and your letter delivered to the offices of the Lord-Governor of Eastreach in Carterscroft. As I refused to pay any bribes, the letter may take a while to be given into his hands. The city remains as it was, a place where any office and any responsibility is available to the highest bidder without regard for law or for the general welfare. I have returned to Eastgate, accompanied by a pleasant little man of learning, and I also engaged a groom to take care of Windrider, a fellow named Vodric. We arrived in Eastgate four days ago.

This whole area is a mark of weakness of Eastreach Province and the Overking in Foere. The City of Bard's Gate maintains control of the mouth of the Great Amrin River and the entire southern bank of the Estuary, which is more properly a deep gulf of the Sinnar Ocean. These are areas of strategic importance to Eastreach, but they are left to the control of Bard's Gate.

Eastgate

The Cleric's Tale, continued

In full summer, the city is at its high tide of population, with eighteen or so thousand people within the wall, camped outside, and living on ships in harbor. When the river ices over, the place shrinks down to a town of four thousand or so until the next trading season. There is but little of the graft and bribery one sees in Eastreach. The citizenry of Bard's Gate polices itself almost as effectively as they corrupt foreigners, and Eastgate is essentially a colony of Bard's Gate. The laws are precisely the same, and the city is governed by a representative from Bard's Gate itself. The chief constable, one Meliador Gane, appears to have matters of crime well in hand.

I met with the High Priest of Thyr to gain information about my main question, about heresy in the north regions of the Borderland Provinces. In a nutshell, it appears to be on the increase in Eastreach as the people there look for some kind of salvation from the increasingly unjust taxes they bear. For the most part, Eastreach is plagued by lesser heresies, those that merely detract from the useful worship of a god by adding mistaken doctrines, beliefs, and rituals into the deity's actual liturgies and prayers. With our lessening forces and supporters, we have become utterly dependent upon the Church of Thyr to detect such outbreaks, and now the Church of Thyr is waning in strength as well. We will almost certainly be forced to employ witch-hunters and other sources of information, or our paladins will spend all their time ferreting out evil rather than actually fighting it. My servant made an oddly intelligent comment yesterday, that the Reliquaries of Jamboor might be a source of that kind of knowledge. I hadn't even realized he had been listening to my conversations, for in general he is a fairly stupid sort.

The decline of our churches, Thyr and Muir, is by the same forces affecting us in Bard's Gate, as one might expect here in Eastgate, an annex of Bard's Gate itself. The Mitrans are simply more fashionable than the Church of Thyr, and the Church of Mitra has virtually assimilated the entire following of Solanus. The Church of Thyr remains strong, but its influence is declining fast here.

I have decided to carry on southward into the Gaelon River Valley instead of heading east on the Trader's Way to Telar Brindel. That road is fairly safe from Eastgate to Telar Brindel, and I hear that the Bard's Gate fleet stationed in Telar Brindel continues to patrol the waters of the Amrin Estuary without much problem from the ships of Pontos Island. It continues to astound me that the Lord-Governor of Eastreach allows Bard's Gate to patrol so much of its coastline, but I suppose navies are

expensive and the Lord-Governor would rather line his own pockets.

In any case, I shall proceed south on the Trader's Way to the Gaelon River Bridge and the town there while my little companion the scholar goes excitedly to Endhome, where he perceives a great hope for the Borderland Provinces to recover from the receding influence of the Kingdoms of Foere. He has joined one of the caravans for protection, and I saw to it that he was not cheated on his payment for membership in the group. I and my servant Vodric will meet him in Grollek's Grove if our paths should cross again.

Gaelon River Valley

The Scholar's Tale

Dear Diary,

I have arrived in the great seaport of Endhome, trading capital of the continent. The journey here was uneventful, following the Trader's Way from Eastgate along the southern bank of the Amrin Estuary, which is protected by an association of nobles who call themselves the League of Estuary Lords. I am told that monsters and brigands occasionally strike northward from the Gaelon Valley, for it is wild so far north, but the caravan guards told me that this is one of the safest parts of the Trader's Way. The influence of Bard's Gate is very strong here, for the countryside lies between the Bard's Gate colonies of Eastgate and Telar Brindel, but the cities do not try to directly manage the affairs of the Estuary Lords.

Duskmoon Hills

The Scholar's Tale, continued

It is said that in the Duskmoon Hills to the north and west of Endhome, there is a fabulous labyrinth of ancient construction filled with treasures and wonders of old, ripe for the taking. Oh that I were an adventurous soul to explore such places! But I am not, and I did observe that during the trip through the Duskmoon Hills our guards were very alert and even looked a bit nervous. I admit that this distressed me. Perhaps the rumors I heard were not tempered with any discussion of the risks involved.

Endhome

The Scholar's Tale, continued further

Endhome is a metropolis of about thirty-five thousands of people, and a bustling port. I was disappointed to realize that their political influence is virtually nil, for I had assumed such a wealthy place would be taking some action to stabilize the chaos and corruption that seems to be spreading from the retreat of Foere. They organize trade up the Gaelon River, but for the most part, they simply seem to sit and wait for trade to come to them, which it certainly does.

There is much of interest here, but the mages of the Wizards Academy gave me an urgent letter to deliver to a wizard in the great city of Manas by the name of "The Notable Rhomenides." They have offered to pay for my journey from here to there, which is something of a major consideration. My funds are a bit low at the moment as a result of losing several wagers with the caravan guards, and I was getting ready to sell my horse. Although I would like to see more, I must leave immediately upon the King's Road to the capital of Suilley. The Kingdom of Suilley, for certain, must hold the key to preserving civilization in the Borderland Provinces against a tide of chaos. The streets are said to be crowded with noble knights and benevolent merchants, all working together to build a new feudal empire that will exceed the glories of Foere like a bonfire overshadows a candle. Such a brave new world to have such people in it!

Gaelon River Valley

The Commoner's Tale

I am still bound for Troye and will deliver this summary with the others into your own hands. I accompany a cleric of Muir at the moment. The Trader's Way from Eastgate to the town at the Great Bridge is much as I remember. It travels wild land, bridging multiple small rivers, tributaries of the Gaelon. The area is settled with small baronies and a few towns along the way. These valleys are the home of proud people, separated into hundreds of valleys formed by the tributaries and ridged with hills on the sides. They have a tendency to overthrow tyrannical overlords, but I continue to point out that this is an area ripe for invasion if a large force ever musters itself. There is no higher stratum of nobility developing that I can see. Monsters lair here in great numbers, and my cleric of Muir heard many requests for help as we traveled southward, but apparently she in on some assigned task and regretfully turned all of these pleas down. Clearly, she is quite upset that she could not pursue each and every one of the requests for help. My summary is: manticores (two), giant (one, and questionable, I think it was a villager banditry-operation designed to lure travelers off the road), ogres (three) and reports of a robber baron raider (one). Nothing out of the ordinary, although I heard tell of a dragon raiding farther in the valley's interior, which is likely but also hearsay evidence.

Gaelon River Bridge

The Cleric's Tale

This town of Riverbridge is an unwall'd sprawl on both sides of the great bridge over the Gaelon, which has accumulated a population of three thousand or so. The influence of Endhome's merchants is very strong here, although the Valleyfolk are still as independent and proud as anywhere else in this region. A witch-hunter had brought in two heretics, not of the lesser variety but true followers of the Idolist heresy, bearing the tiny "saint" figurines that characterize this deception by the demon-prince Fraz-Urb'luu. Unbeknownst to those praying to the statues, their reverence gives power to the demon rather than granting a saint's intercession with an actual deity. I was enlisted to conduct the trial of heresy, and upon investigating the figurines, it was clear that these are the genuine article, the prepared and specially-made idols, one face painted over another. The heretics clearly had no idea that their figurines were demonic in origin, and firmly believed that the statuettes had power to intercede with gods of good rather than a demon. I offered them a sentence of penitence if they recanted, to undertake a pilgrimage to the town of Cluin, there to seek healing at the Rock of Yenomesh. One persisted in his beliefs and refused to recant; I had no alternative other than to order his soul rescued and redeemed by fire. The other heretic was mortified to learn the error of his ways, and immediately recanted his beliefs in the idols. He is to travel to Cluin, barefoot and filled with prayer on his pilgrimage, and seek atonement at the Rock of Yenomesh. We shall accompany him as far as Grollek's Grove, but from there I intend to ride the Trader's Way south. There are few who ever patrol that road, so I will follow the strictures of the goddess and see what evils cross my path to die for their sins.

The groom I hired in Carterscroft has been roving through every tavern in the town, no doubt drinking his way through barrels of ale. I came across him in the Fat Farmer Tavern, which is a good place to learn about the gossip and doings of the upriver villages and the small feudal settlements along the tributary rivers. The fellow was sitting at a table with several members of the Keelcaptains Guild, which maintains warehouses and flophouses in the town and helps to regulate much of the river transport. The Keelcaptains looked annoyed that a peasant had sat himself down with them, but they continued their conversation regardless. A single glance at Vodric tells you that he understands only a fraction of what he overhears, and even that poorly. The Keelcaptains could reveal all of their trade secrets at that table, and Vodric would probably barely

understand that boats were involved. In a way, I envy him his ignorance of the world's cares.

So, this may be the last letter you receive from me. I will give it into the hands of my repented heretic at Grollek's Grove, and he will deliver it into the hands of the priest of Thyr at Cluin. The goddess willing, I will write to you again from the City of Albor Broce. If you do not hear from me in six months or so, please read my name to the paladins and commend me to the ranks of those who have fallen. I will continue to write, so at the same time you learn of my fate, you may also receive a packet of other letters more recent than this one.

Grollek's Grove

The Scholar's Tale

Dear Diary,

Grollek's Grove is a trading post established by the surrounding provinces to protect, harbor, and resupply caravans that travel along the Trader's Way and the King's Road. It is an important intersection of trade routes, but it is isolated and very close to the Gundlock Hills. Indeed, we made our way through those hills to reach this place and, can you believe it, I saw a dragon! Fortunately, it must have fed recently, for it wheeled in the sky above us in a majestic gyre, then moved on. The sight will remain with me all my life, although I have had to purchase new hose, for I soiled the ones I was wearing. Grollek's Grove is at the intersection of the King's Road and the Trader's Way and although the surrounding lands are empty and infested with monsters, heretics and bandits, I have no doubt that it will eventually grow into a great metropolis. Provided, I suppose, that trade increases. It is said that the Kingdom of Suilley diverts northbound caravans into its own territory in the far south where the Flatlander Road intersects with the Trader's Way. I suppose that a noble and growing place such as Suilley must still look after its own interests.

Moreover, I have gone into business. Yes, me, a humble scholar now turned merchant! My run of bad luck at cards has ended, and I won several boxes of merchandise from a Sunderland trader. I have rented space for them in the wagon of a caravan bound for Manas, where I am bound. My cargo, for so I flatter myself to call it, is a hundred small, beautifully painted figurines of saints crafted by holy monks in remote hermitages of the distant Moon Fog Hills where they maintain a vow of silence except once a year when the figurines are blessed in a dramatic ceremony of concentrated holiness. The Sunderlander was obviously quite stricken at his loss, but he did indeed have an incredible run of bad luck with the cards. Fortunately, he still has several boxes of figurines remaining, and I am glad not to have completely bankrupted the unfortunate fellow.

The King's Road

The Commoner's Tale

Letter to the High Exscriptor at the Great Reliquary of Jamboor.

I have made the long, indirect trek from the Gaelon River Bridge through Grollek's Grove to the King's Road, and I am quartered in a small free city called Mirquinoc, which is a bizarre place I have never visited.

No doubt this place would have been conquered by someone long ago, either the Rampart or the Kingdom of Suilley, but it lies at a place that would cause war between the nations if it were taken. It is directly on the north side of the King's Road, and if the Kingdom of Suilley crossed that boundary, the Duchy of the Rampart would see it as an attempt to block the King's Road to the coast. Despite the fact that the Duchy of the Rampart has been backed up to two hundred miles from Troye, it still maintains the fiction that Foere somehow controls the road for a thousand miles.

The cleric of Muir and I have parted company, for she is carrying on down the Trader's Way toward Exeter Province, and the barefoot heretic left me at the crossroad of the South County Road on his way to Cluin.

Mirquinoc

The Commoner's Tale, continued

About this city of Mirquinoc, though. Apparently it is built on an ancient crossroad, and parts of it overlap with a fey realm. One sees sprites here and there, and one has apparently attached itself to me, suspicious that I might be doing something to endanger the city.

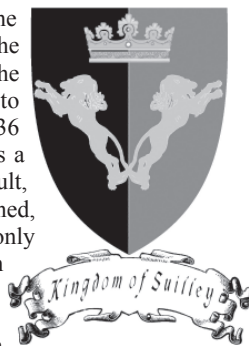
In any case, since I had never heard of this place, I will mention that it has a population of almost eight thousand, not counting the occasional sprites and other fey creatures that wander in and out of their own realms here. It lies just south of a range of hills called the Keelstones, which probably mark the edge of the Gaelon River Valley. A very major temple of Narrah the moon-goddess is also to be found here atop the city's central hill. As with the city, I had never heard of this temple's existence before, and I have prided myself on knowing of the main temples in these lands.

Kingdom of Suilley

Book of the Borderlands

Erudite commentary excerpted from the Book of the Borderlands, by the Sage Yervil Dirge, Honored Fellow of the Library of the Endhome Academy of Wizardry, Alchemy, and Arcane Knowledge

The Kingdom of Suilley seceded from the Kingdoms of Foere in the year 3222 of the Imperial Record. The County of Toulle and the Province of Keston also seceded from Foere to swear vassalage to the king of Suilley in 3336 I.R., 181 years ago, beginning Suilley's role as a growing feudal empire. Progress has been difficult, and the Suilleyn treasury is said to be badly strained, for despite his widespread authority, the king only controls the area around Manas with a truly firm hand. The rest of the Suilleyn kingdom is ruled by eight ducal houses, giving the king a great deal of political power, as the dukes seldom unite against him. On the other hand, since all tax revenue passes through the hands of these high nobles on its way to the royal treasury, actual payments to the treasury are often shorted or delayed by the nobility. As a general matter, Suilley is a land of fairly chivalric knights and mostly honest towns, with a stable feudal system, productive and rich in the areas where the wilderness has been conquered.



Town of Cluin

The Heretic's Tale

Testimony of Recantation of Heresy, as recorded by Palmadoc, Priest of Thyr at Cluin, as made by Martin of Gaelon, who cannot write, but talks much.

My name is Martin of Gaelon, and I recant my heresy fully and with understanding. I was taken by witch-hunters near Riverbridge, tried by a cleric of Muir, recanted my heresy, and completed my penance to walk barefoot from Riverbridge to Cluin, seeking redemption at the Rock of Yenomesh. Did I say it right? Ah, good. I just came from a sermon by Sigilline, the cleric of Yenomesh. This little town had a miracle, did you know? Yes, of course, you live here. She says nobody knows who lies under the Rock of Yenomesh, it grew from nowhere over the grave of an unknown rider who bore a holy symbol of the God of Glyphs. Such a sermon of wonders! Have you ever been to one of her sermons? Oh, right.

Well, I didn't know if a priest of Thyr would go to a ... yes, I suppose the clerics of Thyr also had a hand in the miracle. Yenomesh is clearly a powerful god, and the sermon was full of fire and glory. I think I shall take Yenomesh as my patron, have you ever considered taking Yenomesh as a patron? No, of course I suppose a priest of Thyr might not think of it. I went to the Rock and touched it, and a feeling of wonder flooded through me. I feel that Yenomesh almost talked to me. What, Thyr? No, Thyr is a dry and dusty old fellow. Boring, if you get my drift, begging your pardon as one of his priests and all. I suppose you would see it differently. Are you writing all of this down? They say Yenomesh gave writing to us. Isn't it wonderful that even the priests of Thyr make use of the blessings of Yenomesh? Yes, I suppose you're right, I do make my decisions about religion quickly, but things become so clear. Well, I agree that it also seemed clear when I fell into heresy, but Yenomesh is no heresy, it is obvious. High Priestess Sigilline says we should spread the word of Yenomesh's glory. Have you ... no, we talked about that. Oh, I'm sorry I have been keeping others waiting. I didn't see anyone else in the temple antechamber. Yes, thank you for the blessing of Thyr, it has been a pleasure recanting heresy to you. Contribution? I didn't realize I needed one, I gave all my money to the Temple of Yenomesh after buying a pair of shoes. Thank you, though. Be well, and may Yenomesh bless you. And Thyr, too, of course. May Thyr bless you also. Farewell!

Trader's Way South of Grollek's Grove

The Cleric's Tale

Testament of Isobel Ironfaith, to be delivered into the hands of a paladin or cleric of Muir if I should perish.

I am now far to the south of Grollek's Grove, in the empty run of the Trader's Way along the border of Suilley and the District of Sunderland, traveling with a small caravan of Endhome merchants. The ravines of the Gaelon River Valley and the rocks of the Gundlock Hills have given way to rolling plains, although we are also beginning to see vast, old-growth forests as well. The trees are generally far back from the verges of the road, though, and do not offer ideal spots for bandits to ambush travelers. We did have an unpleasant moment when an obvious robber baron and his cavalry stopped us on the road seeking tolls, for the barons of this eastern part of Suilley are far less happy with the King's authority than those of the heartland. However, when I raised my holy symbol of Muir, they decided not to risk their souls and moved along the road, grumbling to their plate-armored leader. I considered removing them from the world, for I strongly suspect they are breakers of the law, but they were under the leadership of a noble, and I do not know for certain the feudal hierarchy here. It is possible they are authorized to collect taxes, although they had removed their livery and rode with unmarked surcoats. Another example of how we are starved for information in our task. Perhaps my manservant was right, and we should consider some sort of arrangement with the temples of Jamboor.

There are very few settlements here, and the road is obviously dangerous. A dragon was seen over the Gundlock Hills only a few days before we arrived in Grollek's Grove.

South County Road

The Scholar's Tale

Dear Diary,

I have almost reached the great city of Manas with my cargo of figurines, having traveled the South County Road from Grollek's Grove into the heartland of Suilley. The farms here are prosperous and the villages frequent, with shining knights on the road and farmers with brimming wagonloads of hay and turnips, drawn by the astounding great-oxen. I look forward to seeing the great capital of this hope for civilization's

survival in these lands that have admittedly seemed a bit weak in morality and steadfastness in my travels so far. I have made my first trade as a merchant, from a traveling dealer in opium, which is a medicinal product produced mainly in the Lorremach Highhills of Suilley at the Town of Pfefferain. It is brought to Manas along the Flatlander Road. The merchant struck a hard deal but agreed to accept some of my figurines in exchange for the opium, which is to be smoked in a pipe before sleeping, and may also be used to reduce the pain of a wound.

Not only did I make this transaction, but I have sold some of the opium to those in the caravan who were injured by the sudden attack of a manticore as we passed through a forested and hilly part of the road. We lost three of our number, one being carried off in the manticore's great claws to its lair. Our wounded purchased some of my medicinal opium at what I consider to be a good profit to myself, and I have prayed to one of the little figurines so that the saint will intercede on behalf of the wounded, giving them quick healing and a full recovery.

Indeed, I also tried a bit of the stuff myself to settle my nerves after the manticore's attack, and it most certainly has the advertised effect. I had pleasant dreams of a man wearing a featureless mask telling me how well I had traded the figurines, and giving me all sorts of advice about being a skillful merchant. I know that it must be the power of the medicine creating visions of things that do not exist, but my mind must be more subconsciously active than I thought, for the tricks described by the vision were certainly things that had never occurred to my conscious mind. Quite intelligent advice, although perhaps a bit on the deceptive side. Perhaps it was even the figurine's saint speaking to me. Such things have happened, for on the way past a town called Cluin I met a fervent believer in the god Yenomesh, one Martin of Gaelon, who has dedicated himself to spreading the word of a miracle that took place in Cluin. I flatter myself, though. I am no more the sort of person who sees miracles than I am the sort of person who would worship the demons of the great pit. It is simply my own subconscious mind. I did mention to Martin that I am a dealer in figurines, after which he seemed to avoid me, which is strange.

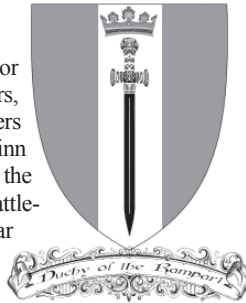
Duchy of the Rampart

The Commoner's Tale

To the High Excripter of Jamboor, by Excripter Voldric. I have met up with one of our couriers, known to me personally, so I am sending my papers ahead of me along the road. We stay at a roadside inn not far outside the walls of Troye, a place called the Duke's Arms, which displays the heraldry of the Battle-Duke on its sign outside. You might even be familiar with the place. This is the second unfortified inn we have come across, a sign that we are in stable and peaceful lands at last. Rather ironically, my most dangerous encounter of the journey took place as we left the relative wilds of the Kings Road and entered the Duchy. A band of hill giants had apparently descended from the heights of the Cretian Mountains, raiding villages around the Duchy's borders. For whatever reason, the barons of the area were slow to respond, each leaving the task to the others, it seems, and we actually met with the giants upon the road, their clubs stained black with blood and their wide-mouthed faces wild with the joy of pillage. Most of the caravan scattered, and I managed to run around the slaughter-ground to safety, warning eastbound travelers on the road as I continued on my way toward the capital.

I plan to meet with the Reliquarian of Troye when I arrive, before taking the South Road to the High Reliquary itself. I trust that my good friend Sartir Yen Dar still holds the office.

I admit I was surprised to see giants on the King's Road, even though accidents do happen. The Rampart has always been the stout wall of the Kingdoms of Foere, and the Duke is officially the commander of the armies of Foere. In past years, the Duchy has always been proud and ready to fight, so I find it hard to believe that the nearby nobles failed so badly to fulfil their obligations. Is this sort of lassitude and decadence becoming common in such a near border of the Overking's lands? If so, it spells badly for the fate of the provinces even farther away from Foere's reach.



Kingdom of Suilley, continued

City of Manas (part one)

The Scholar's Tale

Dear Diary,

Manas is the capital of the Kingdom of Suilley, a great and sprawling metropolis, filled with merchants like myself. It is the home of twenty-eight thousand and more, including King Ulrich IX, who lives in the royal Palaz Terondel except during the mud season. Manas is an ancient city dating back to the days of the Hyperborean Empire, and it has greatly outgrown the ancient walls. Another set of walls were apparently under construction, but the building of them has stopped due to lack of funds. Apparently, although Suilley is a growing empire, it is spending all of its treasury to maintain the new lands and build the empire, leaving the kingdom's coffers sadly depleted. Nevertheless, it is obvious that this place is at the heart of power. I have toured the great market of the Damozel Square at the city's center, seen the great Caerronde Citadel, and soon I will begin surveying the various goods available here, since I will want to sell my saint-figurines. Asking directions from a splendidly dressed herald in the Urbantine Square, I discharged my duty to the mages of Endhome by delivering their letter to the Notable Rhomenides, into his own hands, no less! After this, I shopped around in the street markets and purchased a long opium pipe, for I have been relying more and more on the relaxation brought by the medicine, and I was pleased to see that there is a goodly quantity of the drug available, for I knew I might run out of my current supply.

This reminds me. There is a tax at the city gates upon all products to be sold in the city, and they look through a merchant's goods. I realized that the tax on my beautiful figurines might be quite high, and cut deeply into my expected profit. As the customs-officials drew nearer to our wagon, I recalled the procedure in Eastreach Province for avoiding such formalities, and when the official reached for my figurine boxes I tossed a gold piece onto the top of the box and winked at him in a conspiratorial fashion. He turned to the accountant behind him, who was poised with pen and quill, and said, "Two boxes of fine turnips." I paid a trivial amount for the tax on my so-called turnips, and proceeded through the gate with the rest of the caravan. I have realized that we merchants operate on an entirely different plane of commerce than the peasants. We deal in coin, not barter, and a bit of deception is part of the business of providing for the needs of civilization. It is merchants who will protect the Borderland Provinces from the decline of civilization. It was a true epiphany, and I could almost see the masked face of my subconscious mind nodding with pleasure at my final understanding of such things.

Pfefferain, Hjerrin, Lorremach

The Cleric's Tale

Testament of Isobel Ironfaith, to be delivered into the hands of a paladin or cleric of Muir if I should perish.

I have reached the Town of Pfefferain, the last true bastion of civilization in the southern parts of Suilley. Beyond this point, there is nothing but scattered villages until reaching the Wilderland Hills and crossing into the Foerdewaith Province of Exeter. I traveled south on the Trader's Way from the Gundlock Hills, and had a number of adventures, rescuing one village from a marauding band of those barbarians known as the Vanigoths who live and raid for a hundred miles beyond the flanks of the Forlorn Mountains. This band was farther north than ordinary, and well-armed, but I managed to scatter them, killing three before they fled.

THE LOST LANDS: BORDERLAND PROVINCES

This was my first time to see the great Stronghold Hjerrin, and it is an impressive sight. Hjerrin occupies the top of two adjacent mesas, one on each side of the Trader's Way, and is built up between them to create a stone tunnel through which caravans may pass without entering the stronghold itself. The fortress is a vast construction of drum towers and thick walls, powerfully defensible. There is a small village's worth of buildings and craftsmen in the great tunnel, who cater to passing merchants and travelers, including two inns, but I was invited to enter the stronghold itself, quite an honor as I understand. I had a long and serious conversation with Guardian-Sacrist Lars Medovar, the cleric of Vanitthu who ministers to the garrison of the stronghold, and who gave me a great deal of information about the increasing Vanigoth incursions. With the Endhome merchants, we continued on toward Pfefferain through the Lorremach Highhills, accompanied by one of the professional guides known as Hillbreakers.

On the road to Pfefferain, traveling through the bizarre, sandy terrain of the Highhills with their wind-sculpted rock formations, we were attacked by a dragon. It was young and inexperienced to judge from its size and behavior, for it unleashed a blast of its deadly breath over the tops of our heads, just to throw us into a state of terror, as it made its first pass. It landed, unready to exhale death, and apparently it wasn't used to having one of its prey charge forward on a trained warhorse to attack. Windrider smashed into it with iron-shod hooves, and I struck it a hard blow with my mace before it could overcome its surprise. It backwinged to get away from us, and slammed one of its wings into a spire of rock that it certainly should have remembered if it had taken proper account of the battleground. In any event, it was unable to take to the air, and Windrider and I launched ourselves at it again. No one left this field unscathed; two of the caravan's guards died, and I was carried away by the merchants with my armor and body ripped through like tin and tissue. The dragon is dead, and but for Muir's grace I would be too, for my wounds festered while I lay unconscious in the wagons on their way to Pfefferain. When we arrived, High Priest Wairran Enceptus of Muir took me into the care of the temple, and I recovered from the grievous wounds inflicted by the wyrm.

I have spent some weeks in this town, which is one of the centers of Suilley's opium trade, and survives at the edge of these deadly but breathtaking hills. It contains a large number of non-human residents; the mayor, indeed, is half of elven blood himself. This Arellias is a mercurial sort, flitting from one mood to another, but seems essentially harmless. His four or five thousand citizens like him well enough to keep him in power, and their vote is what determines the law here. Oddly, no armor may be worn, and no weapons carried, within the town's hill-guarded walls. I had no difficulty with the prohibition on armor, for mine is mostly reduced to steel ribbons at this point. It seems an overabundance of caution to keep the peace and civic order, but, again, this town determines its own laws and customs under charter from the Suilleyn king.

My Endhome merchants moved on while I was convalescing, on the road south to Exeter Province, and I will follow along behind them to Albor Broce. There is a knight here, Sir Yrodh of Ninz, who will bring copies of my past letters on the Flatlander Road to Manas through Alembretia, so that they will not be lost along the way. I remain here for another week to regain my strength.

City of Alembretia

The Knight's Tale

*Letter from Yrodh of Ninz,
who is more educated than many rural knights*

My Lady Wife,

Isted of coming home directly, I rite to tell you that I am bringing a message to the priests of Muir in Manas, wear they will pay a reward for reseaving it. This will pay for the repairs to the manor's east wall and our other costs this year, I warrant. The harvest is in, so I need not be there for the nonce, and I deem this jerny a good one for our fortunes. I am in Alembretia, and wen I pass by here on the return I will buy you a fine vase of colored glass. Here they make such things, glassware such as you have never seen, graceful and bryte in hue.

You would like Alembretia, I think, for the cloths worn are as noble as ever I have seen, and worn by even the merchants and glassmakers. I have seen hye collars lined in fur, feathers in great fanning sprays, and jewels to glitter in the sun. It is the most vastest place you have ever seen, with thirteen of thousand folk living in a sirklet of walls and stone towers. The tower rooves rise to hye points, and are painted blue, and the city flag is a wineglass over fyre. I have sed prayers at the temple of Ceres for my jerny, you will be glad to hear, and I have been lent a good palfrey by the hye priest of Muir in Feferayne. I shall send this letter by Culbert, for you may need him for the werk. Culbert says the people here are ded cruyl, and perhaps you would not like the city after all, for I agree with him that they do not treat there poor folk as we do in Ninz manor or anywear in the baron's desmesnes.

With great love,

Yrodh

Duchy of the Rampart

City of Troye

The Commoner's Tale

To the High Excriptur of Jamboor, by Excriptur Voldric.

I have collected various bits and pieces of information here, as a matter of habit. The city's tax rolls stand in the vicinity of forty-four thousands, as before. Three of the wind-driven wheels of insight currently stand at the glyph Nefej, five at Eyul, two at Yenez, and ten at the blank face. Habit from my younger days; I know you will already have the status of these particular wooden pinwheels, for the reliquary no doubt checks them daily. Troye is plagued by a recurrent and strange phenomenon, the sudden appearance of nonsensical pamphlets and handbills that appear to cause outbreaks of strange and somewhat malevolent behavior among the cityfolk. I have avoided reading any of these for the time being, upon the advice of Reliquarian Sartir Yen Dar.

I will leave copies of my letters with Sartir Yen Dar to deliver to the Great Reliquary, although the courier should already have delivered the original copies. I proceed on to Metzel and the Yolbiac Vale to see if I can gain more information about the strange pamphlets. It is the sort of thing that originates in the strange cauldron of the Vale, incomprehensible to outsiders, but the strange thinking and traditions of that place have a certain inward-dwelling consistency of logic.

Kingdom of Suilley, continued

City of Manas (part two)

The Scholar's Tale

Economic disaster, Diary! The markets here are bloody well *filled* with figurines of saints. None of them are as beautiful as mine, and all of them seem to be dedicated to a single saint such as Saint Jorb, Saint Kathelynn or Saint Joianthe of Nains. No one seems to be interested that mine come from as far away as the Moon Fog Hills. I have had an idea, though — or I should say, my masked subconscious mind gave me an idea under the medicinal influence of my nightly pipe of opium. What is important here is not the influence of the saints, for all of the dealers in icons, holy symbols, and idols can justly claim that their products are holy. Rather, it is the story behind the icons that adds value to them. When we passed by the town of Cluin, we must have been within the influence of whatever saint lies beneath the fabled Rock of Yenomesh there, so I will simply

embroider my sales pitch to say that my own figurines have been touched to the Rock and thereby blessed with the direct influence of a saint. Few others in the market can claim such, and the tale will no doubt add great value to my wares. It is virtually true, since we did pass quite near the Rock, and the figurines were with me at the time. Farewell, monks of the Moon Fog Hills, and welcome to the unknown saint of Yenomesh, who now supports my commercial endeavors.

Addendum: As expected, the figurines are now selling well, and I have disposed of half of them in a single day, of course keeping my own figurine, to which I now pray nightly before smoking my opium. It is a wonderful medicine, putting me into communion with the masked figure behind my own mind. I have constructed several ritualistic prayers that I give to my saint figurine, from words overheard in the dreams, and these bring me a sense of peace and harmony. I see more clearly the deceits and trickeries of the people who inhabit the Borderland Provinces. Certainly, nothing here is what it seems to be. To survive and prosper, I also must seem other than what I am, for it is in this realm where civilization truly operates. Nothing is honesty, not in Eastreach where bribery rules, nor in the city of Endhome where merchants change prices daily, nor in Manas, either, though I once expected this city to be a shining hope of honesty. Opium gangs here are violent, and there are killings between them every day in the dark alleys and byways of the city streets. Their plans of empire fail for a lack of coin. I even see now that the priests themselves are nothing but merchants of their gods, selling blessings in exchange for loyalty and prayer.

Exeter Province

The Cleric's Tale

Testament of Isobel Ironfaith, to be delivered into the hands of a paladin or cleric of Muir if I should perish.

I have ridden alone, except for Windrider's company, through the wild and empty lands of Suilley south of Pfefferain, arriving at one of the border forts maintained by Keston Province and Exeter Province on the south side of the Wilderland Hills. Although they are threatened by the beasts of the wild and the Vanigoths of the hills, the scattered manorial estates and villages of this region are kind and welcoming to those of the Hyperborean faiths. Few as they are, the farms are prosperous and well-guarded by their feudal overlords. The values of chivalry and responsibility remain strong in this rural region. Travelers should be aware, though, that roadside inns are very widely separated. You will sleep under the stars more than once on this two-hundred-and-fifty mile trek, as Windrider and I did.

Exeter Province already feels strange to me. The garrison of the border fortress seemed huge for its task, especially since there is a castle held by the Kestoners within shouting distance of its walls. The cleric of Vanithu stationed there as chaplain tells me that the Lord-Governor of Exeter Province has shifted vast numbers of his troops to the borders, fearing a second incursion such as the one ten years ago by the Clans of the Wilderland Hills. Apparently, his strategy is to defend borders and towns, but the chaplain hears tell of chaos developing in the rural lands, depleted of their guards and left to the perils of the wilderness, which is deep here. It may be a prejudice of mine, but the clerics of Vanithu annoy me. I spoke of the role of individual courage and bravery fighting the threats of the wilderness and protecting the peasants of the countryside, but he simply shrugged at the idea of individual courage. Their hierarchy rules all, and they seem always to think in terms of soldiers and garrisons rather than knights-errant and heroes who attack evil in its lair. Yet they are stalwart guardians, so I hold my annoyance in check; it is doubtless unworthy of me.

The other thing that unsettled me was the presence of a so-called "Squire of the Ferret," some kind of order that hunts down traitors at the behest of the Lord-Governor. He was sleek and well-dressed, which is never a good



sign to see in tax-collectors and inquisitors, important as their task might be. I begin to fear what I will see once I ride deeper into the lands of Exeter.

Duchy of the Rampart, continued

Town of Metzel

The "Commoner's" Tale

To the High Excripter of Jamboor, by Excripter Voldric.

I have been employed as a teamster, bringing mostly empty wagons to the Town of Metzel at the foot of the Cretian Mountains, hard by the pass leading to the Yolbiac Vale. I had almost forgotten the appearance of the place, it has been so long. The buildings in the walls inside are so high and disorganized that the interior of the town looks like a pile of wood, plaster, stone, and shingle. On the other hand, one can never forget the smell; a pall of stinking smoke from iron-smelting operations hangs over the entire town like a shroud. Since there is no reliquary or chapter-crypt here, I have checked the two wheels of inquiry to see where the wind has clicked them over time. One shows the glyph Barhalats, and the other stands at the blank face. I gave due thanks to the cleric of Sefagreth for maintaining them, and paid the appropriate fee to the grasping god of commerce. The cleric, Yole Canter, also gave me various papers the church of Sefagreth assembles with trade information, and in return I recited wholesale prices of various commodities as they stood in Grollek's Grove when I passed through. I conclude from these papers that Metzel stands at a population of almost three thousand crowded for protection behind the massive walls and drum towers of their town. They have been sending less pig iron to the city of Troye, where demand seems to have fallen off slightly, and I include a separate sheet with Metzel's sales taxes reported over the last six months of the year.

I have engaged a guide to take me through the Yolbiac Vale, for too many people disappear there. With luck, my next letter will be from the town of Coelum in the Vale itself.

Kingdom of Suilley, continued

Flatlander Road

The Knight's Tale

My Lady Wife,

I have such tales to tell when I return, for I have seen the grayte city of Manas, and it is truly magnificent. I am almost back to Alembretia, and look forward to seeing you soon. This road is a bit slower than I thought, for it is not one of the stone high roads but a hard-packed trail, wide and mostly well kept, but I fear what it would look like in the Mud season. They say the kings ordered the Flatlander Road to be made so traders from Exeter can get to Manas instead of staying on the Trader's Way, in which case it is grayte testament to the power of our noble monarch. I will buy you a vase in Alembretia, for I am well paid by the priests of Muir who were pleas'd to get their letters.

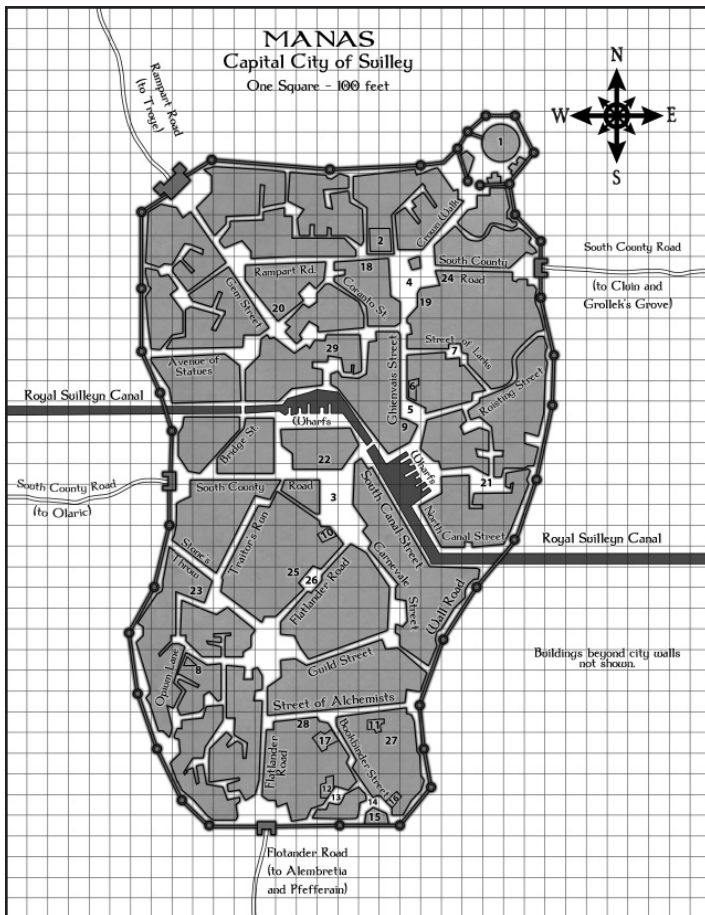
Truly, tho, the city of Manas is not for me. It is too large and people are killed in the streets there over coin and opium. I thought to buy a saintly figurine in memory of Muir and this strayng jerny I have taken, but I disliked the man selling the bristest and most pretty of the statues. His cloths were ragged, and he had a twitch in one of his eyes. Moorover he reeked of opium and had a hawty demeanor for a street vendor talking to a knight of the gentry. And then, do you know? The priests of Muir gave me just such a little statue of the goddess herself. It is not as pretty as the ones in the Damozel market, but the

priests warned me away from dealers in such things, for some being sold in the markets in recent days are heretical in their nature. I told them of the dealer I had met and they said they would look into it.

My payment is interesting, for it is a letter writ by the House of Borgandie, a banking house in the City of Remballo. For a fee, which was paid by the Church, this letter may be given to the house of Borgandie in the City of Alembretia, and they shall pay the amount writ upon it. It is a marvelous way to travel without the burden of actual coin. Such things people dream of to make life safer and more easy, it amazes me.

With great love,
Yrodh

PS along the way I did scatter a band of churls who made to rob the peasants of a village I passed by, and the villagers send you a small wheel of wax covered cheese I have in my saddlebags. I think it will keep.



Map Key — City of Manas

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. The Caerronde Citadel | 16. Temple of Yenomesh |
| 2. Palaz Terondel (Royal Palace) | 17. Temple of Jamboor |
| 3. Damozel Square | 18. Consulates of Toullen and Keston |
| 4. Seven Widows Market | 19. Consulate of Foere |
| 5. Urbantine Square | 20. Headquarters of the Corps of Wardens |
| 6. House of Burgesses (City Government) | 21. The Court of Armorers |
| 7. Feathermarket | 22. Temple of Mitra |
| 8. Thieves' Guild | 23. Temple of Bowbe |
| 9. Trade Embassy of Bard's Gate | 24. Temple of Thyr |
| 10. Trading-Consulate of Endhome | 25. Temple of Telophus |
| 11. Palaz Tourne | 26. Courtyard of Seasons |
| 12. Mansion of Cioseppio | 27. Pytharian's Tower |
| 13. Rune-Bull Square | 28. Tower of the Notable Rhomenides |
| 14. Fane Court | 29. Temple of Freya |
| 15. Temple of Belon the Wise | |

Kingdom of Suilley, continued

City of Remballo

The Scholar's Tale

Dear Diary,

I made a fast retreat from the city of Manas, for there was a terrible and unbelievable coincidence! Some fiendish member of the Idolist Heresy was selling figurines of saints in the Damozel Market, pernicious things that address a demon-prince of deception, whose name I shall not put to writing. They are said to be the listening ears of saints, just like mine, but all prayers delivered to them serve to strengthen the demon-prince rather than any true god. I might even have seen the blaggard, for I, too, was selling my own figurines in the very same market. For fear of being accused, since my valuable figurines are apparently identical to the heretical ones, I made off quickly on the road to Vourdon, and I have reached the City of Remballo, midway or so between the capitals of Manas and Olaric.

Remballo is a trading city of some sixty-seven hundreds, built with vast open spaces within the city walls for the quartering of beasts, caravans, and cargo. I have taken a room in the Hooded Falcon Inn in the south part of the city, far from the eyes of any inquisitors that might be looking for saint-figurines. This neighborhood of Dead Fiddler Square is a place where people do not ask questions, but is still a safe place, not a slum by any means. Out of an excess of caution, I have stored the remaining figurines for a small fee in a place called the Four Corners, a small district donated to the city in times past by an abbey. In the deed of transfer, the monks retained the right for the place never to be searched by the city guards, nor any of the goods there seized. So it is immune to inquiries by the city watch. A good place for my cargo to lie undetected by officious priests and pompous guardsmen, ignorant of my role as a skilled merchant in protecting the very civilization they leech upon.

This is also the seat of the House of Borgandy, a banking family. They sell discounted letters of credit for redemption in other cities, and I went to their fortified counting house with the intention of trading some of my now-heavy stock of gold for a letter of credit in Olaric. I made what was apparently a mistake, for I tried to bribe the clerk into writing a letter crediting me with more gold than I actually gave, which should have been a reasonable transaction for him, but instead he had me ejected from the counting house with a stern warning not to return. As I was carried out, I shouted at him that this is not how business is done in places like Eastreach, but all he said was, "Good," and then I was dragged out, flailing. The fool turned down a good bribe, and I hope his children starve by exactly the amount he turned down.

I enclose the map of the city, which I purchased to identify escape routes just in case, and I shall move on quickly. I am still too close to Manas for comfort, and the clerk at the House of Borgandy saw my face, which I like less and less for people to do. I must be following the guide of the masked being that speaks to me in my medicinal dreams, and I have, in fact, purchased the mask of a plague doctor to wear when I am out on the streets. The anonymity comforts me.

Postscript, same day: I am leaving in the company of several knights who are headed for the Tournament of Lilies in Tertry in the County of Toullen. They believe me to be a doctor because of my mask, and I have not corrected their mistaken impression. It may serve me in case the authorities here decide to come looking for me.

Exeter Province, continued

City of Albor Broce

The Cleric's Tale

Testament of Isobel Ironfaith, to be delivered into the hands of a paladin or cleric of Muir if I should perish.

It has been an intensely depressing trip from the Wilderland Hills into the heartland of Exeter Province, as I thought it might be, and worse. As I was told, Lord-Governor Benevic has drawn virtually all of his force into the towns and out to the borders of his realm. Paranoia reigns here in the countryside, for tax-collectors roam free, assessing higher and higher taxes to pay for the military, and accusing those who cannot pay of treason, rather than merely of poverty. The great belts of primordial forest are rife with predators both natural and foul, and they make wider excursions into the unguarded lands where humanity once stood guard.

Windrider and I came across a miserable clutch of would-be bandits in the middle of setting up a clumsy ambush. Ordinarily I would have scattered them by force, but the goddess stayed my hand and they surrendered abruptly the moment they saw my holy symbol, wailing for help rather than mercy. Apparently they are all displaced from their homes and accused of treason by the Squires of the Ferret, about to turn to brigandry from sheer desperation and hunger. Upon making sure that they had not actually robbed anyone yet, I absolved them of their intent to commit the crime. Failure to pay taxes is an offense, but it is not the offense of treason by anyone's accounting, and I have decided that their sentences are unjust before the gods. So I brought my little rabble to the nearest town I could find, fed them with some of the coin I was given by the merchants of Endhome after killing the dragon, and I pieced together a plan that will hopefully be approved by the higher authorities of the church. We remained in the town long enough to engage clothiers and blacksmiths, and I have designed myself a coat of arms showing the dragon I killed, and my horse Windrider. I have had this device sewn onto a dozen surcoats, and armed my would-be outlaws with spear and shield, the shield also painted with the horse-and-dragon arms. By taking them into my service, I assume a great responsibility, but it should remove any stigma of treason upon them and allow me, perhaps, to continue the service of the goddess with a greater force than my own hands.

We entered the gates of Albor Broce earlier today, with my dozen outlaws making a creditable little column behind me after considerable practice on the road. Now that they are all bedded down in the stables of the inn, I have set my hand to this letter and will make a grim report on the conditions here. Albor Broce is no small town, it is the capital of a province of Foere, and has no reason or excuse for utterly foolish behavior. There are almost fifteen thousand people living here, so it is a place of vital importance, but they have walls and adequate garrisoning. And yet the place is crawling with soldiers drawn in from the countryside. Mustered knights trim their fingernails in pavilion tents on the fields beyond the city, worried about getting home for harvest-tide. The walls are filled with soldiery like ants, and siege engines are almost crowded on the towers. I cannot conceive of what such a drain this must be making on the villages and manors of the countryside. If the border strongholds are the same way, this country is emptied of all protection within its borders, outside of the towns.

The city gates are topped by heads on pikes, traitors to the Lord-Governor and the Overking. It is clear that the Overking's government here is engaged in nothing more than a panicked defense of its status, trying to wring money from an area that has effectively been abandoned other than at its farthest borders. Once I have cleared the legal records of my new followers and bought supplies to bring my plan into operation, we will be leaving as soon as possible.

Yolbiac Vale (part one)

The "Commoner's" Tale

To the High Excripter of Jamboor, by Excripter Voldric.

My hired guide has brought several of her "clients" safely through the mountain pass from Metzel to Coelum. Some of them are unquestionably smugglers bringing stolen goods out of the Duchy of the Rampart, but obviously, that is none of my concern. Coelum is a large town with a population of almost three thousand, dominated by high, dark, stone walls so old that they are uneven and buckled between the towers. The buildings within are tall, overshadowing the mud streets that wind between them into alleyways and small courtyards. The roofs are steeply pitched, shingled with molding wood, and chains of garlic and other strange charms are securely nailed over all the doorways.

The place serves as a kind of capital for the Yolbiac, which has no single ruler, only a loose coalition of the "old families." These are only baronial families, although some of them have wide holdings more appropriate to a count, perhaps. Representatives of the old families meet here from time to time to discuss their affairs, but they are not rulers in any sense of the word. They do appoint the mayor of Coelum, though, which is the major center of trade, so there is a kind of loose affiliation of power here, which is enforced by the mayor's troop of heavily armed Husjaegers. The temple of Thyr seems to be obsessed with hunting heretics, and the other traditional religion in town is that of Narrah, the moon goddess. Relations between the two churches are not good. There are also druids here in the town, for druidism is extremely strong in the countryside of the Yolbiac. They do not interfere much with the town itself, however, for it is not one of their holy sites. A druid known as the Drogas Mondu (a title, perhaps?) seems to be the spiritual leader for the town's druidic followers.

My next stop before returning to the Great Reliquary will be the base of the Ghostwind Pass. I do not feel entirely safe venturing off the roads in this dark and eerie realm. On the off chance that I do not survive the journey, I am sending this letter back with the next group of travelers crossing the pass back into the Duchy of the Rampart.

County of Vourdon

The Scholar's Tale

Dear Diary,

My knights are excellent companions, and they have fascinating tales to tell about their travels! Our travels along the South County Road have been pleasant, for the villages and inns are frequently spaced, and the landscape is prosperous with crops and wildflowers. One of the knights fell sick after eating a bad pheasant at our inn, and I gave him one of the figurines to pray to. Miracle of miracles, the next day he was cured, and I rose greatly in the esteem of my companions, three of whom bought figurines from me immediately.

The County of Vourdon is a part of the Overking's empire, ruled by Count-Palatine Peilourth Rhombard. It is quite an independent realm, for the title of Count is hereditary and the Overking's court at Coughais does not send a Lord-Governor to oversee matters. I am content to have passed through Suilley after my mistreatment there.



City of Olaric

The Scholar's Tale, continued

Olaric is the capital city and the seat of the Count-Palatine. After seeing Manas and Endhome, I can testify that the city is extremely provincial.

It has a population of nineteen thousand or so, and all of them appear to be farmers, those who buy from farmers, and those who sell to farmers. The wine is horrible. However, since most of the country grows flax and manufactures linen and rope from it, the Ropemakers' Guild has the largest ball of twine in all the continent of Akados!...and possibly the world, though I have never been to the likes of Khemit or Tircople to confirm this. I feel privileged to have seen it and hope to someday make the trek to far Libynos in order to validate its claim for posterity.

One very strange incident also occurred at my inn, The Troll's Tankard, which incidentally is not a particularly clean place. Last night I prayed to my figurine, as I always do, and smoked a pipe of opium, which I always do, and then went to bed. I dreamed as always of the masked being, my subconscious or whatever it is that provides me with such good advice. Once again, it was chanting the words that I now use in my nightly prayers. In the middle of the dream, a rat awakened me. The verminous thing was actually standing on my leg to nibble at the plague-doctor mask I always keep close to hand. Still half-asleep and in the vestiges of my dream, I repeated the words of the chant and smacked the rat away from me. It landed dead upon the floor, though I had struck it merely a glancing blow. The event disturbed me, but I remember the words I spoke, and I have a feeling that I am destined for even greater things than the life of a mere merchant, for — can you believe it, diary — I felt a great coursing of power through me when I spoke the words of the prayer and struck at the rat. I wonder if this power to damage is limited only to small beasts, or if it would also work on larger creatures as well. I will try to find an opportunity to test this, perhaps on a dog.

At the moment, due to some legal tangle, heretics are not being prosecuted in the City of Olaric. Given the types of suspicions I have fallen under, I have decided to rent a house with my rather extensive supply of gold and remain here for the time being. Perhaps I will go into the business of banking, like those miserable Borgandys of Remballo.

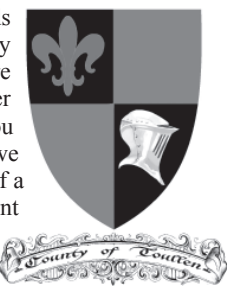
County of Toullen, City of Tertry

The Joustier's Tale

Ho, Clenet! I am writing to you from the fields of the Tournament of Lilies in Tertry, all the way south in the County of Toullen. You wish you were here, I know it, but your elder brother is the better lancer, am I not? I shall bring you next year and you can try your luck at the lists. On our way here, we met up with a little doctor-fellow who cured me of a stomach ailment by giving me the figurine of a saint to pray to, but I have lost the bloody thing. I think I left it in my room at the Notquite Inn. Strange place, that. It is on a big triangle of land between the crossroad of the Provincial Military Road out of Exeter and the South Road. The thing is, that puts it outside the boundaries of all three of the surrounding provinces. If the baron ever discovers what you and his wife are up to, this is the place to find sanctuary!

The tournament grounds outside Tertry are huge, larger than the city itself — which is a respectable size since the city houses thirteen thousand citizens. But all of Toullen loves the joust, and this is the tournament of tournaments throughout all the Borderland Provinces. There are probably a second thirteen thousand here outside the gates, assembled in our pavilion tents with banners flying, servants running around, and peddlers everywhere. The jousting begins tomorrow, and since I have no victories at a major tournament yet, I have to earn my place by winning a few bouts. The competition looks good, but they don't look as good as me. Not in skill, and not in handsomeness, either.

Sir Denis of Laines



Keston Province

The Cleric's Tale

To the Church of Muir in Kingston

With wagons, and my former outlaws, their families, and several others who have joined us, we have crossed the Trader's Way border into the wilderness of east Keston Province. I suspect that more refugees will follow if the Lord-Governor of Exeter does not abandon his policy of keeping his soldiery mewed up in the towns and border castles, leaving the peasantry as prey for whatever might hunt in the wilderness, including the Lord-Governor's own human ferrets.

This area was emptied out by the Wilderlands Clan War ten years ago, and threatens to return to the wild chaos of untenanted land. I have determined to establish a temple-stronghold here, where I shall protect my followers and offer a home to those who make their way here, preferring the risks of the wild to the consequences of Exeter Province's failing leadership. I am dispatching this message with three of my reformed outlaws so that my temple may be properly enlisted. At some point, I will visit the capital at Kingston myself, but for now, I will stay to build and protect. Perhaps the citizens of the capital will be able by then to straighten out all the buildings whose foundations shifted during the Fiend Rains, and the city will no longer look like a jumble of tilting toys with its uneven streets.

Isobel Ironfaith

High Priestess pro tem of the new Temple of Muir at the village of Empty Meadow



County of Toullen

The Joustier's Tale

Ho Clenet! Expect to be eliminated in your first joust here, for I was eliminated in the second round. The joustiers here are incredibly skilled. I was marked by the High Baron of Saltfalcon as a likely candidate for a better showing, though, and he has recruited me to ride in his livery next year! He will pay a third of my expenses to return for the next tournament, so I will be here again, and bring you with me!

Sir Denis of Laines

Yolbiac Vale (part two)

The "Commoner's" Tale

To the High Excriptior of Jamboor

I have sent this letter on to you in case of problems. My journey to the north of the Yolbiac Vale continues to wind through dark, forest-shadowed roads where peasants view foreigners such as myself with great suspicion. Druids with their stern faces offer blessings to travelers, and obviously expect us to become lost in the tangled wilderness or fall afoul of the supernatural. I journey onward to the north through a dark stretch of forest with an ill reputation. A wheel of inquiry is in this tiny village of Valere, which is odd, and not one I remember. I checked it, and it shows the glyph Barhalatsu. I leave tomorrow at dawn, for I would not travel through this wood after dark.

Note of the High Excriptior of Jamboor: This is the last letter received from Excriptior Voldric. The next Excriptior to enter the Yolbiac Vale should ask about him. Use caution in asking such questions, though, for, as a side note, there is no wheel of inquiry located in the village of Valere.

County of Vourdon, continued

City of Olaric

The Scholar's Tale

Dear Diary,

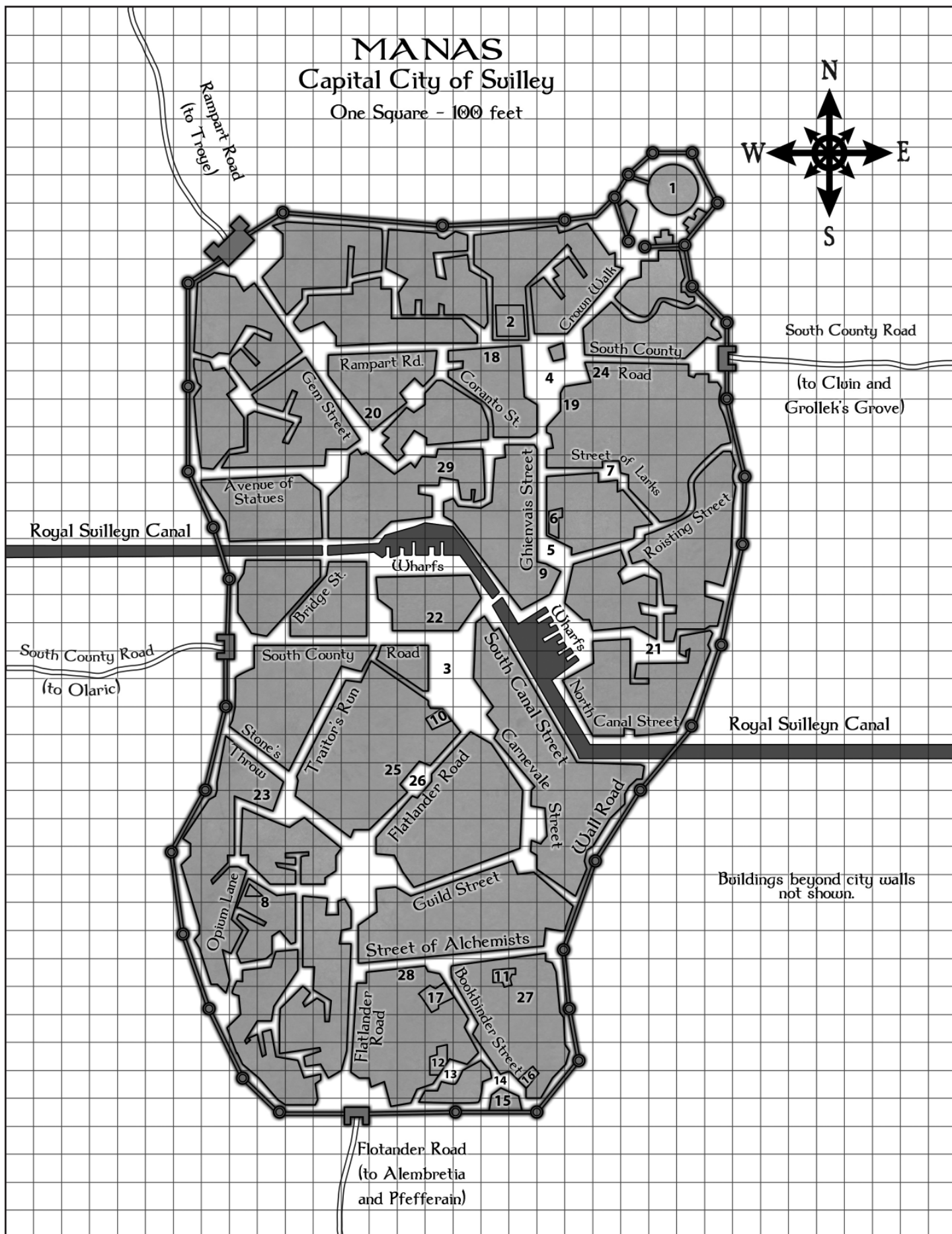
This is my last entry, and I will hide you away in a safe place. All mysteries are resolved, only to create fascinating new ones hidden behind! As I walked the streets of Olaric looking for a house to buy or rent, I came somehow through a dark alley where a man in a mask opened the door for me, just as if I were expected. His mask offered no features, like the being that dwells in my subconscious, so of course I entered the door. It was a place of worship, Diary, where a circle of four all wore featureless masks. They handed me one, and, hiding my face from them, I donned it. Imagine my surprise when next they held out to me the garments of a priest. These are worshippers of the great demon-prince Fraz-Urb'luu, Master of Deception, and I, it seems, have been admitted into their ranks. As a priest, no less, Diary, for they say they were told to await my arrival! I have changed my plans, now, after consultation with the high priest of our master Fraz-Urb'luu, and instead of remaining here in Olaric, I will travel the Borderland Provinces again, knowing my true destiny. There are still many wonders to see, and there is also much — very much — to be done.

Manor of Ninz

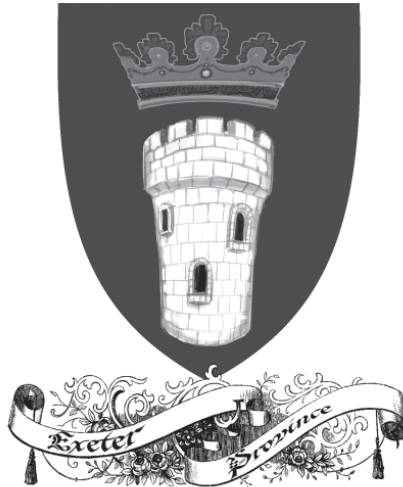
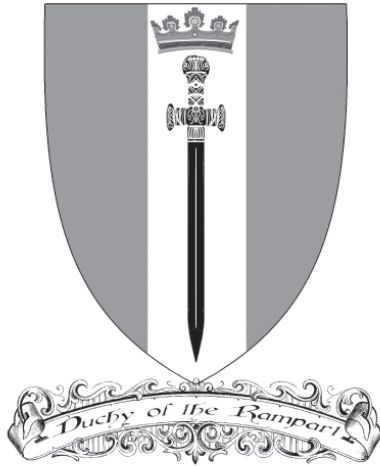
The Knight's Tale

To the Priests of Muir in Manas,

I am rytting to thank you for the payment, which I changed for gold in Alembretia. I have bought a vase for my lady wife, and put the money to good use. We have repaired the east wall of the manor, and had suficient left to build a new dovecote and two beehyves. Any traveling cleric of Muir is always welcome here at Ninz, and if the beehyves prosper, we shall serve all the bread with a portion of the new honey.



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