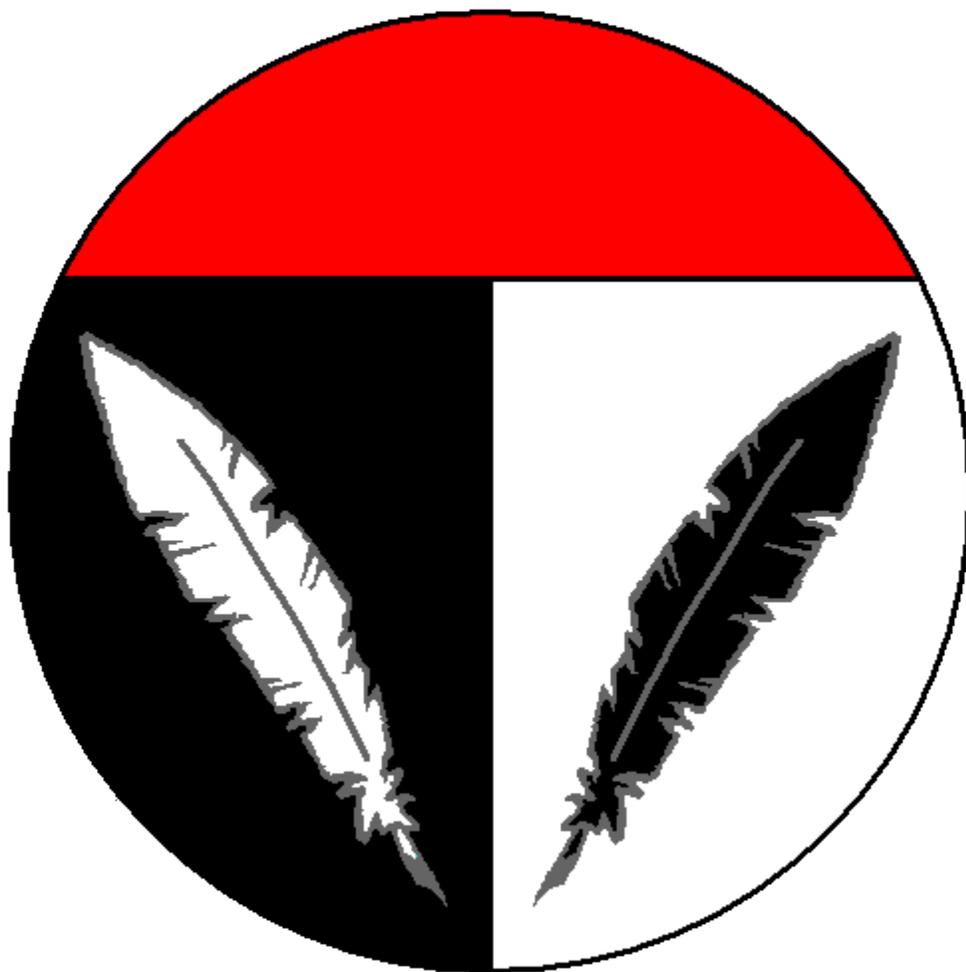


The Derneherald



First Quarter 2015

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Please e-mail submissions to edithdebrereton@gmail.com.

Cover art this issue by Sunni Sparks

From Your Chronicler

Hello everyone! I hope that this edition of the Derneherald finds you well. We are, as of the Domesday report, a quarterly publication – this means that you know when to expect another newsletter! As you will see, many things have happened since our last newsletter, and I believe many good things are still to come.

I have set to work to rebuild our shire's “yellow pages” so to speak, which will be a registry of our regular members, what skills they identify in themselves, and how to contact them. Our last registry had hardly any of our current members on it, so this update is needed.

I am also hoping to compile an “official” written history of the Shire of Dernehealde. If you have any information, especially about the early days of the shire, please let me or one of my fellow officers know! Our contact information should be on the shire website.

YIS,

Edith de Brereton

Salvete from the office of the MoAS!

Since our last newsletter, we've had an event! That's right, folks. We did it. And what an event it was with roughly 75 people in attendance and enough classes that I had to hold two at once most of the day. I'd call that a success. I saw a lot of great things happening there among our shire and abroad so keep up the great work.

Speaking of which, the cold season is the best time to get some A&S done. I know that the sub-zero temps recently have us thinking that the warmth of summer is still a long way off but don't be fooled. It will be here before you know it! Summer is traditionally a sort of slow time for classes as people wind up for Pennsic and fighting. I would personally like to see that change this year. I know we all like fighting (yay, fighters!) but A&S is a big part of the SCA, too. I would like to see more A&S at meetings, in public and on display so that people get a better feel of what the SCA is. Yes, we have stick jocks but we also have food and beautiful illumination, poetry and bardic performance, garbing and research. Share it with us.

I'm interested in organizing a bardic circle around a campfire sometime this summer maybe with some camping thrown in. If this sounds good to you, let me know and I'll make it happen. As always, if you're interested in a particular area of A&S, whether it's learning or teaching, please approach me in person, on Facebook or via e-mail. Keep up the good work and continue being awesome!

YIS,
Pompeia Furia
MoAS

From the Exchequer

Greetings to all on this cold wintry day in our wonderful Shire! A lot has been happening of late, including my first report as Exchequer! Finances are being figured but I can guarantee you we still have money. Officer badges are in the process of being purchased as regalia for our shire, and the check is currently with the seneschal to be delivered to the Drachenstein Treasures proprietor.

We have also approved the hiring of a new mercenary, Gustav the Battle Camel, to assist us in our upcoming melees season. Though it is still some months away, the sooner he comes, the better so he has time to train with our new fighters. He will be paid in water and materials for battle. Stay safe and stay warm through the long winter!

YIS,

Dorian Le Roux, via Wilhelm Salzburger

From the Seneschal

Greetings all, from your favorite Cat-Herder!

With the icy grip of Winter still upon us, and illnesses running through the Shire I'm happy to say that things are progressing well in the Shire.

The date for the Annual Shire Auction was picked to be March 31, 2015 with a start time of 7:30pm and ending at 9:30pm. The earlier start and finish times are to help the Exchequer get all monies collected and noted by the time we have to vacate the room at 10:00pm.

Shire Officer badges/medallions have been ordered. I sent the check via Certified Mail so that we will have confirmation of the check being received by Drachenstein Treasures. With luck, we will have Officer Regalia before the end of the Semester. Dorian, our lovely Exchequer and I will work on a means of keeping track of the Regalia so that it doesn't go missing.

We still need to decide if we want to hold another "Haunted Tower". I know that people had fun and really enjoyed our event last November. To that end, we need to have someone volunteer to be the Event Steward. It was suggested that we co-host the event with the Incipient Canton of Briarwood – since the site location is literally in their backyard.

I am still looking for ideas on creating an effective outreach program to the local townspeople. I know we meet on OU's campus during the school year, thanks to the efforts of our OUMS Student group. But, how can we make the SCA seem more appealing to non-students? Please do give this some thought and let me know. Hopefully, the opportunity to work with the Nelsonville Public Library on their themed Final Friday will help with the outreach to more than just students.

I guess that's the quarter in a nutshell from this side of the podium.

Finche

From the Persuivant

Sain baina uu?

Now that event season is warming up, I'd like to remind everyone that it's a great time to say thank you to people you appreciate by recommending them for awards. A lot of people have been working hard on things over the winter. Take time to recommend these people for awards!

Not sure what people have? Watch for updates to the order of precedence on Dernehealde's website. Still confused? Come talk to me! I'd love to walk people through either the awards process or go through the order of precedence with whoever needs it!

As for other news, we had a wonderful event full of classes! Enough classes to fill two classrooms! I'd like to thank everyone that helped. I could not have done the event without everyone's help and volunteerism. It was truly one of the most rewarding experiences I have ever had in the SCA.

Yours in Service,

Altani Unegen

Persuivant and Event Steward for Haunted Tower 2014

Greetings from the Castellán and Marshal In Training

Great news! It's a suppository! I jest, really. So our Gold Key is small and stable, if still short for male garb. Just on the off chance anyone didn't know my tenure as Castellán is coming to an end, and to that Morgan will be stepping up so expect her to be speaking up a bit more.

As far as the MIT duties all is well. I have one more event and the test then we are all set. Also when the weather breaks in a few months I will be setting up a second practice. Whether or not this will be a weekly thing is yet to be seen.

Medieval Math Edition Two

Submitted by Michael Perron

Livestock and their care have always been an important skill for people to learn. Can you manage animals enough to solve these problems?

1) A practical question that was posted in the 1700s AD in England: Imagine you have a circular field which is surrounded by a fence. You wish to tie a goat's leash to the fence and give enough slack so that the goat may graze on half of the field. Should the leash be less than, greater than, or equal to the radius of the field?

2) A traditional Arabian puzzle (which dates to at least before 500 AD) is as follows: A wealthy father dies, leaving his camels to be divided among his three sons. The oldest is to receive half the herd, the middle will receive a third and the youngest is to receive a ninth. However, there are 17 camels. Can you find a way to honor the father's wishes without killing any of the camels?

3) Alciun of York was one of the first headmasters of St. Peter's – now one of the oldest colleges in the world – and published the first puzzle books in the late 700s AD. One of the problems is probably the earliest example of what came to be known as the jeep problem: A head of a household wishes to move 90 modia of grain to another house which is 30 leagues away. The camel carrying grain can only carry 30 modia of grain at a time, and must eat 1 modia of grain for every league required. Figure out how to get the most grain possible to the destination.

A November Fight Practice



Photo by Katlyn Stump

The Wooing of Etain

By Megan Randall

Once upon a time in a land not so far away, there was a woman named Etain. She was the most beautiful lady in all the land. Her father kept her close and tried his best to protect her from life's woes.

One day a Lord from a neighboring province, Midir, visited Etain's kingdom. As soon as he laid his eyes upon her he knew that she must be his. This occurrence is stranger than it sounds. You see, Midir already had a wife waiting for him at home. But Midir seems to forget this quite easily. This lack of foresight is not without repercussions, dear Reader.

Anyway, back to the lovestruck couple of beautiful Etain and her Midir. Do you remember how I said that Etain's father is a bit overprotective? Well he doesn't want just anyone to take his daughter, and when someone does, he plans for it to benefit him as well. He proceeds to assign Midir several impossible tasks. These tasks include creating seven rivers and seven plains in this lush green land known as Eire. Luckily, Midir simply asks the Dagda for help.

Now that Midir has earned permission to marry Etain, he proceeds to bring her to his home. Unfortunately they also now encounter his very jealous wife. This wife then has quite a temper tantrum. When you look at the story from her point of view, this reaction is almost reasonable. The conclusion is that she turns Etain into what appears to be a puddle of water... out of which emerges a caterpillar, and we then have the biggest and most beautiful butterfly in existence.

This butterfly proceeds to search for Midir. When she finds him, it doesn't take long for him to figure out what the butterfly truly is. Midir is currently stationed in a field with his soldiers.

The Anvil's Ring

T.H.L. Eidiard an Gobihainn,

O.G.R. (X2), C.W., C.E., A.P.F., C.R.C

Randomly Bardic Type Person, Storyteller and Standup Philosopher

"Sit my friend! It is good you have traveled so far in the depth of winter to see me. The wolf roams the land again, eh? Here drink this and warm up a little while I tell you a tale..."

No @\$^ there I was. I kid you not. On the battlefield at Pennsic. Not too long after Finche's famous charge into the Tuchux where she laid waste to part of their line. It was a sight to see I grant you! They tried to engulf her, but she made them pay the Dragon's tax to be sure! But shortly after, I was commanding a section of the line as a spear duel broke out. Not an unusual occurrence to be sure, but there was a Duke on the other side of the line who decided that this day I should be the recipient of his wrath. No, I will not say he was angry in any way nor acting no less the peer of the real he was, but honestly he could not land a good shot on me. Contrary to popular belief I am quite bendy at times. I was starting to tire truthfully from dodging one of the better spears I have ever met.

Watching across the line I could see his frustration building as he began to shoot more and more at me, glancing shots off my polearm as I defended myself. Then he struck true and accurately and I took the blow. I acknowledged it and went to the back of our lines where a miracle of sorts happened, I was healed and able to return to battle (It was a resurrection battle) I then did as any good soldier of the Midrealm would do and returned to my still fighting unit. I saw the Duke again and he looked crestfallen that I had returned. He squared up against me again and I did something he did not expect and totally confused him, I stepped out of the line right in front of him and gave him a clear unobstructed target. No defense, no dodging, I just stood there as he threw a very kind and well calibrated shot into my midsection. I acknowledged it and returned behind the lines again only to be granted a second miracle, able to fight again. By the time I returned to my unit on the line the cannon sounded and it was over. The fighting at least as I felt there was something left to be done.

I sought out the Duke, now helmetless and breathing hard. "Excuse me, Sir? I came to explain myself..." He looked up, obviously unsure why I had sought him out "Yes?" he said to me. "I came to talk to you because I did not want you to think I was shrugging off your blows, they weren't hitting me, just my polearm I was blocking with. That is why I stepped from the line and opened myself up for the shot...I wanted you to know I would take a good blow, just so you know..." I turned to leave and he said "Wait...who is your Knight?" I answered quickly "Sir Ustad The Dreaded Hasan, sir..." I pointed nearby "That is him over there.." He nodded "I know him..wait here.."

I stood there as he approached my knight and greeted him, entering into a few minutes of conversation. I cannot say what was said as I could not hear, but I could see Ustad grinning, something that when he does so looking at me usually makes me a tad nervous. They parted ways and the Duke returned, patted me on the shoulder as he walked by with these parting words "You do your knight proud, Squire..." And he walked away without waiting for a reply. I glanced to Ustad who was still smiling and gave me a thumbs up. I did right.

I do not tell this tale to glorify my actions but want it to be a lesson. Play well, play honestly and have fun. Be willing to talk to an opponent and be friendly. One of the hardest things about fighting is being truthful with yourself. When you can do that you will enjoy it so much more.

Till next time,

-Eidiard

Sunrise on Talford Hill, Continued

Written by Duke Syr Talymar

Missed Part One? See the Spring 2014 issue of the Derneherald!

One man alone had counseled against crossing the river, and breaking the tentative peace. Bran had been an advisor to Alric's father and his grandfather. How old he might be was anyone's guess – older than any other man in the kingdom it seemed. Bran had thought this campaign ill advised and now Alric wished he had listened. As they set up the defenses, Bran came to Alric, "Be brave, stand firm – be *the* King . . . be your folk's King. The Wyrd Sisters sometimes change the weaving of a man's fate if he shows courage in battle against great odds."

Bran believed in the old ways . . . the old beliefs. The three Wyrd Sisters, he thought, wove the fate – the destiny – of men. One was a spinner, one a weaver, and the third sat with shears to cut the thread of life when the weaving was done. But Alric was a Christian; the stories of the Sisters were not something he believed in – at least they were something which he knew he should *not* believe in.

The burden of a crown, as only a king can feel it, weighed heavily upon him. Surely this battle could not be won. King Wulfgar was the master of numbers; even his reserves outnumbered those few who awaited battle on the hill under the dragon banner.

The king had been urged by his earls and thanes to personally quit the battle, allowing the remnants of his army to buy some precious time with the highest price men can pay. Perhaps, they had said, he could rally the people and at some future time, throw out the invaders, and restore the kingdom.

"A king must be foremost in the boldest battle and *last* in the most desperate retreat." The words of the ceremony that had made him a king echoed in his mind as clear as the day they were spoken to him. He had been foremost in the preceding days' battles. Now he must be last in the retreat. He would stay . . . must stay . . . with the army; but he also made a silent vow that he would send many a foe through the gates of Hell ahead of him.

Then send your son Athelric, the Atheling . . . the Prince, urged the lords of the realm. But he too refused, preferring to stand with his father. "A man who prefers to run cannot rule a kingdom nor regain one once it is lost," he remarked. The Atheling knew that the line of kings might well end here, for his mother had died giving him birth and he, himself, was, as yet, unmarried.

Alric, Athelric, and the other nobles sent their horses away. They would stand with the rest of the army and share their fate. Upon hearing this decision, the army was filled with a sense of pride and new hope. They began to sing the old songs of battles long passed and heroes long dead. A few at first, then more as the voices spread like the early morning fog. Of victory and valor they sang as they sharpened their blades and laid their plans.

Numbers might favor the Wolf, yet strategy might favor the Dragon. Alric had ordered the wooden bridge at the village of Talford burned. About a mile to the south, the flames could be easily seen in the late night sky. As he stood watching, Alric turned to one of his earls, Edmond by name, “Is Talford Bridge the only way across the river?”

Edmond braced his left foot against the low-wall; dried blood stained his shoe a reddish-brown. “My King, there was an old bridge . . . a stone bridge, built by the Roman-men some three miles further south; but it has mostly fallen into the river and is impassable; folk have left it for the ravages of time to finish. Wulfgar will not be able to repair it, nor would he take the time. The Eastlanders will have to cross here if they come.”

Alric sighed, “ He will come. The Wolf has tasted blood, and now he comes for the kill.”

Edmond squared his shoulders, “We are not sheep, My King, we will not go meekly to the slaughter, we will not go quietly into the night! The Wolf will rue the day he crosses that ford . . . rue the day My King!”

Alric sadly nodded in agreement and grasped Edmond by the shoulder, “We will meet again . . . when it is done.” “Indeed we will My King.”

As Edmond returned to his place in the line, Alric looked out into the valley. The River Weolund flowed between two ridges. The crests of both ridges were bare of trees, and the clearing came all the way down to the natural ford. The clearing was flanked on either side by woods that became narrower as they approached the ford. It was just the opposite going up Talford Hill. The woods were narrow at the ford and widened out as they climbed the hill. Bran had remarked that it was like the shape of a monk’s hourglass. Thus the ford itself thus became a natural choke point, and six cairns . . . howes . . . burial mounds along the western side of the ancient ford added to its defenses. The only break in them was at the ford itself.

So Wulfgar’s army would have no choice but to cross here. And here he would be forced into that narrow place where his superior numbers could not be brought to bear, for with the bridge burned, there was no way to flank the defenders. It would be a straight, head-on fight and here a few men could exact a heavy toll for crossing the river. It was a good place . . . a very good place to make a stand. Alric had placed archers in Trader’s Grove at the bottom of the hill overlooking the ford and from here they could send flying death upon those who were forced to slowly cross the shallow, but swift flowing waters.

Those that survived the arrows would face a line of spears and great axes as they tried to climb the bank, which was further fortified by the cairns. If they breeched the ford defenses, attackers faced two hundred yards of open bottomland sloping gently, then more steeply, upward. There the archers would send more iron-tipped death raining from the sky. And finally, there would be the battle for Talford Hill itself with the defenders fighting from the defensive ruins just below the crest.

It was a good plan and with larger numbers one that might be assured of success. If they could but bloody Wulfgar enough, he might go home. He might be satisfied with the previous days’ victories and treasures – he *might* go home.

Prince Athelric took command of the right flank; Earl Edgar the left, and the king himself commanded the center. Nothing was left now but the long wait until daybreak when The Wolf would surely come.

Some men built fires to ward of the damp and cold rising from the river, others fortified their positions by piling rocks from the ruins, and fathers stayed close to their sons.

Bran sought out the King in the round ruins where he had placed his banner. He looked out into the valley, “It is a good place My King, the men are fortifying as best they can,” he paused as he surveyed the hillside. “Yes, it is a good place to hold until help comes.”

Alric nodded, but he knew there would be no help. What was left of his army was here. No help would come riding over the hill behind them, and only death would come from over the hill before them. The Wolf would come at sunrise . . . maybe even before.

Hoping to banish such morbid thoughts, Alric turned to Bran and changed the conversation, “I have passed this way many times in my life, but never stopped to ask whence came these stones and what building stood here. Since I might never leave, it might a good time to know about them. Some of the stones like this one,” he picked up one slightly larger than his hand, “are cut deeply with the runes used by our forefathers.”

As he tossed the stone back onto a pile he listlessly mused, “I wonder what they say?”

“Such things are a mystery to many men these days,” replied Bran, “Some of your soldiers are from the nearby village of Talford, perhaps they will know the story.” Bran disappeared into the darkness as the King continued to consult with his thanes and refine the order of battle.

Some twenty minutes later, Bran returned with a grizzled old fighter wearing leather armor and a rusted helm with more than a few dents in it.

“My Lord King, this is Malcolm. He comes from the village of Talford.”

Malcolm made an awkward bow, “Yer lordship . . . er, My King, most have all gone now, the people of Talford that is. They all went further west when the war started.”

“Tell me, Malcolm, about this place.”

“Well M’Lord, all I know is from the old tales told ‘round the fires at winter nights. This be a strange place that’s for sure. Haunted some say . . . ghosts . . . fairy folk. People have seen soldiers . . . old soldiers . . . warriors from the olden days walking up and down the river bank looking out towards the east as if expecting someone or something to come over yonder ridge; and I guess this morning they will come won’t they?”

“That they will, Malcolm . . . that they will.”

“Once I saw such a man at the river. I had been drinking a bit with friends you know and I stopped right there at the ford . . . ‘bout midnight . . . to take a much needed piss . . . ah . . . begging yer pardon sir.”

“It’s alright, even kings piss occasionally.” and Alric smiled for the first time in several days. “Go on.”

“Well, this man . . . he was on horseback . . . yet he crept up on me so silent like that I didn’t know he was there . . . only five feet from me he was . . . as close as you and me . . . and dead silent like a ghost he was. His mail shone like silver in the moonlight. His helm was gold and silver and it covered his whole head and face. Beautiful it was and decorated like I’ve seen no other. There was a flying dragon on the faceplate. All I could see was his eyes. And he looked at me as if he was searching for something or someone and I was not him . . . thank the gods . . . ah God,” he corrected quickly. “Anyways, the wise women of the village . . . the storytellers . . . said that I’d seen the old king for who the village had been named . . . Talford I guess. I was afraid he’d carry me off to that land of fairy some folks say lay under them burial stones. Always, drinking, feasting . . . good times ya know. I’m more afraid of Hell though. I’ve done some things I ain’t proud of, and the priests say I might go to Hell. I kinda like the old beliefs. I like the idea of drinking in a mead-hall and men . . . warriors . . . take’n turns tellin’ stories of the great things they’d done in battle. Maybe tomorrow night I’ll have some good ones to tell myself.”

“I’m sure you will Malcolm. What building are these stones from? Can you read the old runes?”

“No sir, can’t read the old words . . . nor the new ones neither. But the stories say that long ago there was a building here that they called . . . called . . . sanctuary, I think it was. Strange place too. Build by one of them old kings . . . maybe that Talford one. If ya got into the building . . . I guess it was hard to get into . . . you could wish for whatever you wanted and you’d get it. Maybe that’s what them old runes say. Don’t believe it though, lots of people from the village’d come up here and wished for a husband, or wished their wife would shut up, or their sick child would get healed. I once wished . . . stood right here . . . for a bag of gold to go drinking with . . . but nothing never came of none of it. Them wise women, well they said we didn’t understand the old magic; we had to leave something to get something. I don’t understand that, and never had nothing to leave anyways. Maybe the magic left when the building was tored down . . . long ago, long ago.”

Malcolm paused, kicked at a lose stone, then added, “Well m’lord that’s ‘bout all I know.”

“It is well, return to your thane with my thanks.” And with a sad smile Alric added, “Come see me this evening, and if we’re both still alive I’ll buy you a drink, better yet I’ll give you that gold you wished for.”

Malcolm knew he would never collect the gold, but again he made an awkward bow and walked away, with a noticeable limp. He took a few steps and turned, “My King, one more thing, them wise women, they say they sometimes see an old woman washing clothes at the ford . . . always early in the morn. They say it’s a sure sign someone will die that day. And if that washerwoman she talks to you . . . it means it’s you that’ll die. Didn’t see no woman when we crossed last night, but I figure she’ll be there this morning, doin’ a *lot* of washing. If’n you see her yer lordship . . . don’t talk to her.”

“I won’t Malcolm . . . thank you for the advice.” The old man nodded, and walked away returning to his place in the line.

“Interesting story about this place My Lord?” questioned Bran.

“Truly. If only this *was* a wishing building.”

“Ah, indeed. What would you wish for?”

Alric answered listlessly, “Victory of course. The safety of the kingdom . . . and the people.”

Bran picked up a bit of carved stone, turned it over in his hand and continued, “The old man said you had to give something to get something. What would you give?”

Pausing in thought only briefly Alric replied, “I guess that would be an easy answer. In the Ceremony of Kings there’s an oath given as far back as history records, we have sworn to give our lives for the kingdom and its people. So that’s what I would give, that is what I am *required* to give . . . anyway it’s all I have left – my life for a victory.”

“So be it.” came a low earthy voice.

“So be what?” the King queried as he turned to face Bran.

“I beg your pardon sire?” replied Bran although he did not seem *too* surprised.

“What did you mean by the comment, ‘So be it?’”

“I said nothing My King.”

Alric looked about, but there was no one else within speaking distance, “Strange . . . I could have sworn . . .” But there were more urgent affairs to deal with, Earl Edmond was again climbing over the low stone wall. So Alric gave one last glance around, shook his head, and went back to laying his plans of defense.

As the night deepened towards the dawn, so did the army's spirits – defiance gave way to doubt and finally to fear. The songs faded and an eerie foreboding began to settle upon the soldiers. The first faint light of dawn brought mist from the river. A thick grey mist that crept up the hill and swirled among the ranks, settling on them like a shroud making it hard for each man to see his fellows, and causing each to feel alone and abandoned by his comrades. A superstitious dread spread along the line of warriors and some saw it as an ill omen.

Einar, a descendent of the Northmen, was one of those who found fear in the gathering mist, "This is bad . . . this is very bad."

"What's wrong now?" grumbled his friend Aesgir as he lay trying to rest.

"The cold . . . the darkness . . . the mist, now look – lightening beyond the eastern ridge. Lightening and mist don't come together. My father spoke of such a place it's Niflheim . . . Niflheim is rising right here . . . Hel is coming to take us . . . she is coming to take the dead! She's coming from her cold, dark, misty realm to claim those who do not die a heroic death. She's coming for us Aesgir . . . coming for all of us!"

"Einar, you're talking like a frightened old woman. Hel only comes for the old, the diseased, and the coward who does not die in battle. Take courage, we're all gonna die today, that's sure . . . but with a sword in our hand! Hel won't take us today, it'll be the Valkyries that come for you and me!" He slapped Einar on the back, laughed, and continued. "Now this is the way *I* see it – that fog . . . that mist, it's what some folk call the "Dragon's Breath" and it comes to aid the Dragon's folk in their times of peril. Now those Eastlanders, they can't see how few we are. We know what's in front of us, they don't. The mist will confuse them and make it harder to organize and control an attack. But we know where The Wolf's men will be; he has to cross at that ford. Our archers don't have to see them to hit them with arrows . . . they know where they're gonna be. They need only volley fire into the ford or open field to strike at the enemy, and death from out of the mist at the hands of unseen defenders . . . that will spread terror among his ranks. I'll bet the King's already thought about that. Try to get some rest, it'll be daylight soon."

Indeed the sun had not yet crested the far hill, but in the dim light of a red rising autumn sun, riders appeared on the opposite ridge above the mist laden river valley. Within minutes the crest of the hill was alive with troops and war horns heralded the arrival of the dark wolf banner and Wulfgar, King out of the East.

Soon . . . too soon, the army of Eastlanders stood waiting on the ridge – stretched out like a long grey battlement in the morning mist; and there were even more than the defenders had feared. So self-assured of victory . . . so eager for victory was Wulfgar that he did not wait for the full light of day, but began his attack with the first glimmering light of the morn. In his over-confidence, Wulfgar had not organized his troops for battle, but rather he let lose his wolves of war to charge head long into the valley.

The thick moist air was split with the discordant blare of war horns. Into the swirling mists they came and on toward the ford with its awaiting defenders. The ground shook with the thunder of horses' hooves, the ring of steel, and chilling cries of impending battle. At the river's bank, the Dragon's men tightened their wall of shields, and leveled their spears, while axe men shifted their grips nervously. Horsemen and footmen alike disappeared into the river's fog . . . but the archers knew well where they must cross and loosed their first deadly flight of arrows into the ford . . . a rain of iron-tipped shafts fell upon the foeman.

The cries of dying men and terrified horses let the archers know that they had found their mark, and they let loose another volley. Wave after wave charged into the ford as the arrows fell without mercy upon them. The Eastlanders lucky enough to make the far bank faced a shieldwall that bristled with spears. Great axes were swung with mighty overhead blows – splitting shields, helms, and bone asunder while the spears thrust deep into the bowels of those foolish enough to raise their shields in defense. Grim were the war wounds both given and received. Doomed men fell on either side. The greedy raven’s feast was assured. The thick grey fog that dimmed the sight of each fighter also numbed his senses to the carnage that went on around him. Even the proud warhorses were not spared in the effort to fell their riders into the waters below; there warm scarlet-red blood mingled with the cold mud-brown waters of the ford.

They say that after that battle the water was unfit to drink and never again ran clear. The old wives retold the ancient tales that linked the ford with the “otherworld” and olden kings and heroes. Some began to call it the “River Bones” and those in the East called it the “Ford of Sorrows” and never, in all the years that followed, did they attack it again. But, that is far past the telling of this tale . . . much of which is left to be told.

Fighting up the muddy bank, the easterners paid dearly for their disadvantage. But slowly, sheer numbers began to wear away at the shieldwall and the defenders were forced to retreat across the open bottomland. Now The Wolf’s men had a foothold on the western bank. Gwilym’s archers in Trader’s Grove turned their fire to the open ground between the river and the hill as they knew the enemy would mass there for an assault. Again the sounds of death echoing through the mist let them know that their aim was true. But soon . . . all too soon, their position was discovered by Wulfgar’s horsemen who charged through the mists and wrecked havoc upon the archers’ ranks. Those few that escaped took positions with their king in the ruins and awaited the first uphill assault.

They did not have to wait long. Like a massive wave of iron and flesh, Wulfgar’s forces swept up the hill and broke over the forces of The Dragon and the battle was met in earnest. But this first charge, like that into the valley below, was too eager, too reckless, and too disorganized. They had not expected the defenders to be so well fortified or so determined. They had hoped for a quick rout in which they could easily cut down the defenders as they fled. Their mistake was costly. The dead and dying of both armies littered the field, and the grass, already made wet by the early morning dew, became more slippery with the blood of friend and foe alike. But The Wolf’s men were not fools . . . unwilling or unable to learn from their mistakes. The army pulled back and began to regroup in the valley. Ravens, keen for their carrion, began to circle the field, calling, “Kill . . . Kill . . . Kill!” their bloody feast already assured. The second charge would be more calculated and more deadly.

Again Eastlander battle cries rent the fog as horseman and footmen alike rushed the hill. Sword rang on sword, split wooden shields asunder, and made a sickening ‘thump’ as they cut into men’s flesh. The air seemed to quiver with the resounding clash of arms, for, though outnumbered, the Dragon’s men fought as only desperate men who fight for their homes and families can fight. They met the fearsome charge, their lines waivered, but held. Each man who went to his death paved the way with the bodies of his foeman.

Having held against the initial charge the battle now turned to man against man, individual clumps of men fighting frantically. The battle swirled, churned, and twisted. The Dragon’s men were few and the might of the force before them continued to wear at their lines. There were none left to throw into the breach once the line should break. The lines of defense grew thinner with the passing minutes. With each sword stroke an easterner fell, but it seemed that there were always two more to take his place.

Already a dozen men, huscarles all, had fallen surrounding and shielding their king. It seemed as though the whole might of the Eastlander's onslaught was aimed at the dragon banner where the king stood surrounded by his liegemen. And indeed it was, for the eastern king had set out three bags of gold, one each for any man who would bring him the dragon banner, the head of the king, or that of his son. Now Wulfgar assembled his elite guard for a decisive blow. With perfect precision they charged the hill behind their ram-headed banner. And where they struck, The Dragon's line yielded . . . bent . . . and then broke. Atheling Athelric . . . the prince and the left wing of the army were cut off from the rest. It was then that Athelric was taken in his youth as he led a counter attack to rejoin the center of the army where his father stood. But the foeman who laid him low would not have the opportunity to take his bloody trophy or collect his bag of gold. The huscarles saw their prince lying slain, uncowardly men they hastened to his side. They desired one of two things – to avenge their lord or lie dead at his side. The axes, swords, and spears that fell upon Athelric's killer and his comrades were merciless, and the body of the prince was pulled into the center of the defenders.

The war-twins of chaos and carnage ruled the field that day. The time had come for fated men to die – the weavings of their lives cut by the Wyrd Sisters – their destiny determined even before the battle had been met. File-harden spears were thrust and thrown, ash spear shafts were shattered, broad war-shields received blade-edge and spear-point. Savage was The Wolf's onslaught, as fighters fell dead, young men, on either side. Everywhere The Dragon's lines began to fail and men were being driven back. As body fell upon body, the long battle was drawing to a close. The forces of The Dragon were about to be driven to the slaughter.

Alric had seen the moment of his son's death, and despair pierced his heart as surely as any arrow. All of this had been for naught. He cursed his own foolish pride that had commanded men to battle only to bring them to an end such as this, and he cursed the desperate hope, to which he had so tenaciously held, of stopping The Wolf. Some folk might have survived if only he'd allowed them to leave . . . to run away . . . now *all* would die on this day's field of death. He prayed even as he slew the foemen pressing hard against him at every side. He prayed to his ancestors, "Whether you sit in the fabled mead-halls of old or the gilded streets of Christ's heaven, forgive me and take pity upon your folk and your land."

Now the entire army of Eastlanders seemed to be surging into the valley and up the hill to join in the carnage; each man hoping for gold, silver, and booty; no man wanting to be left in reserve when the looting began.

Then again there was heard above the din of battle a blare of war horns and the thunder of great drums, such as Alric had never heard before. They sounded from the far ridge and echoed into the valley below. The Dragon King looked to where the disc of the rising sun could be discerned as a faint golden orb in the mist. And there, coming over the eastern ridge, came a troop of men on horse, yet another dark banner carried before them. As Easterner's shouted in triumph, Alric's heart fell. Out numbered and on the verge of death, the fates taunted him, tormented him with one final vision of the wave of reserves that would sweep across his kingdom and bring it to its knee before the Wolf King's crown.

This new army paused briefly to array itself for battle, then began to move rapidly into the valley. But they did not reinforce the Eastlanders. They came along the flanks then hooked in like the tines of great antlers about to catch the quarry between them. The center, with its dark banner, remained on the ridge for a few moments then began its decent. As if in answer to his impassioned prayer, a ray of sunlight caught the banner that lead the approaching force, the morning breeze turned it and pulled it taunt. Alric's heart leapt as a wild, impossible hope filled him. For the banner he saw was the antlered head of a white stag, with the golden orb of the sun caught in its horns.

“The White Hart.” he whispered in disbelief, but the words echoed within his soul as if in confirmation. No Wolf Lord had fought under *that* banner.

“The White Hart! The Hammer of the Wolf! The Hammer of the Wolf has come!” he shouted in desperation to his remaining troops. “We are the anvil,” he pointed towards the oncoming force, “and The *Hammer* of the Wolf has come . . . hold the line! Fight! Fight damn you, and you may yet live to see the *setting* sun!”

Like a man reborn, he stepped forward into the fray swinging his oath-binding sword. Heartened by their King the army rallied to the call and resounded the cry of “Wolf Hammer! Wolf Hammer! Wolf Hammer!” All along their thin lines they reformed shieldwalls, held their ground, and then began to press forward.

Easterners knew someone, or something, was now in their flank; something that brought renewed hope to their foes. Those that dared to turn and look were cut down where they stood. Those that did not look became fearful and hesitant as to what was happening, and in that hesitancy, the tide of battle began to change.

More to come in the next issue of “The Derneherald”!