

Session #1: Hello, Your Name Is...

For the third week of Fore-Mystery in 3014:

I'm sorry that I haven't had a chance to write before this, diary. What a crazy week it's been! The Stockboys went to the city of Kreutzhofen, on a quick mission for the Brotherhood. It was a delivery mission -- bringing some papers to some sort of political refugees trying to leave the city. Just in case of trouble, we smuggled in two rifles and some explosives -- the glycerine for the explosives were mixed in with the medicines that Sabin carries, and the two rifles were dismantled and hidden in luggage and various places.

The train ride and border crossings were uneventful. We found a nice suite (though with a sub-par restaurant). Djon and Sabin cased the safehouse, while the rest of us had dessert.

Djon and Sabin reported coming across a bloody attack in the town. A terrible thing, and probably part of the terrible disappearances that had been plaguing the city. We would, of course, have reported what was seen to the police -- but for the safety of the folk in the city we had to keep a low profile. In any case, they found nobody home at the safehouse.

The next day Sophia and I brought Djon hat shopping. Sophia got the most darling hat with amazing purple flowers. Remembering what Baba Lukyana always says about dressing elegantly but not flashy, and how whites and blues are important for a proper mindset, I had to abandon the most perfect pink taffeta hat, and instead got one with a much-too-far-understated white plume. (Though I spoiled myself later by getting the hat with the blue peacock feathers, because Lukyana did say that blue was OK.)

Anyhow, Djon, Kargun, Robert and Sabin went out to gather information in town. Meanwhile, Sophia, Reinhold and I went to check out the building. I realized when we were out that Sophia would probably have been happier alone with Reinhold, so I held back a ways. Anyhow, Sophia has a halfling's eye, and saw prints and trails by the safehouse -- it appeared (from the standard-issue boot soles) that the police had come, and that a single occupant of the safehouse left willingly with them. Because of a nail sticking from the sole of the civilian's shoe, Sophia was able to track it all the way to the jail. I wonder if he thought to damage his shoe on purpose, since they were expecting a meet?

Well, from their investigations, apparently that fellow was one of our contacts. And apparently he suicided by poison pill in his jail cell. So sad! But that resolved us to be sure to save the rest of his innocent companions. Meanwhile Robert apparently got himself in trouble with the police, so we thought it wiser to split up. I got myself a local Frodo's guide, and Sophia, Reinhold and I found the most darling inn.

Well, we were all at a loss. So we decided to open one of the envelopes containing the identity papers, in case that showed us something new. It didn't. But opening it gave me an idea. Reinhold (who has very manly handwriting, and now has a manly captain's hat

(though that is another story) wrote a short advertisement, using the name “Mario Celentano” from the fake papers that were going to be given to the deceased, looking for his lost relations, and asking to meet them the next morning at Saint Ranald’s church. I went out (on behalf of my “husband” Mario) to get that ad into the evening papers. And the next day (after a splendid breakfast) we went to morning services at Saint Ranald’s.

Well, the plan worked. We made contact and passed the papers. We spent a few more days in the city, doing a bit more shopping and enjoying the sites, happy to have saved innocent lives.

It felt a little morbid, but because of the police lookout for Robert, and some similarities of description on the passport, Robert traveled on Mario’s papers when we left.

Session #2: Tilting at Windmills

From the second week of After-Mystery in 3014:

Dear Diary,

We were hired by Westerland, to help hold the city of Marienburg against Imperial forces marching through without a formal declaration of war, to invade Bretonnia. The brutal Hun (no offense intended to acting Lieutenant Reinhold or Sophia, who are each of Imperial stock) failed to follow the understood Quenelles accords and the rules of war, by this failure to respect neutral territory.

While in Marienburg, it was decided to retreat back across to the western side of the city, and to create several choke points, by taking out several selected bridges. Robert, on hearing that we would get shot at a bit (surprise surprise, for a mercenary group in wartime!) decided to ask the commanding officers if we could instead blow up the dyke in their city, to totally stop the Imperial advance. Of course, the commanding officers soundly decided not to let him do tens of millions of Nagaroethian dollars in damage to the factories and homes along the river, just in order to slow the Imperial advance by an extra day, but ordered us to stick to the plan and help allow the Marienburg forces a controlled fighting retreat.

Kargun was, understandably, disappointed, because he was not thrilled about climbing up to set off charges on the underside of a bridge while under fire.

Djon and I, meanwhile, loaded up a truck with ropes and chains and buckets and shovels, and the explosives. Lieutenant Reinhold’s plan was to drive up to the retreating Marienburg forces on the bridge, and using smoke grenades (being prepared by Kargun), cover Kargun’s setting of the charges at the keystone of an arch on each side of the bridge.

We put this plan into action. In practice it was terrifying. Not so much for me as for poor

Kargun who was, twice, dangled over the side of the bridge in a bucket, setting explosives, while under fire. Every morning I wake up and pray thanks to Sigmar and to the Widow that I was not born a dwarf. Lieutenant Reinhold really helped turn the tide, by laying down fire to pin the Imperials. Meanwhile, Kargun bore up the danger and humiliation of being dangled.

The bridge was successfully brought down with no casualties on our side, though one of the retreating Marienburg soldiers was lost during the run and explosion on the bridge. We don't know if he survived.

Yelenka's diary [also from session 02]

From the third week of After-Mystery in 3014:

It has been a tough few days, Diary. After the fall of Marienburg, our Westerland employers asked us to set up mines along one of the roads, marking them on maps, so that the Marienburg and Bretonnian forces could defend and entrench those lines as soon as possible. Well, it was more complicated than that.

When we got to one of the abandoned farm villages, we found that it had not been completely evacuated. A farmer was quite insistent with his son sick, they refused to move on. He managed to signal to me that there was some danger in his house. Presuming that there were Imperial scouts (correctly, after all -- perhaps I am developing the sight as promised by Lukyana) holding the family prisoner until their forces could take the area.

We made excuses -- saying that we would come back in a couple days with a doctor before evacuating them -- and left. We slept for a bit in the truck, a dozen miles away, and then set up for a 3 AM raid. We returned to the village. Once we were about a mile from the house, we left the truck and came by foot, so we could arrive quietly.

Lieutenant Reinhold and Sophia were positioned by the front door of the house. Robert and Kargun were positioned by the side door. Djon and I were positioned by a back window. On pre-arranged signal, the side doors were open and firecrackers thrown in. To help add to the confusion and cover (and sense that we had more forces), I threw one in the window as well.

I couldn't hear everything that was happening. But my understanding was that Reinhold and Sophia came on Imperials who were up late and playing cards, but who refused to surrender, instead reaching for their weapons on our entrance. Meanwhile, Robert and Kargun advanced through the side.

At our window, Djon heard an Imperial woman in the darkness and leveled his weapon blind toward her. Having no light or torch, I called on the Widow and cast glow on one of my darts, tossing it into the center of the room. Illuminated, we could see two children

sleeping there, and the armed Imperial. We were calling for surrender, but Djon was jumpy and opened fire rather than waiting to see the Imperial woman's reaction -- which, of course, made her less likely to surrender. I wish that Djon had been level-headed, as we could have avoided the violence and danger that followed had he kept his aim upon the woman and calmly called on her to surrender, promising that she would be made a prisoner of war accorded the rights due under the Quenelles accords and the rules of war.

I called on her to surrender -- to drop her weapon and kick it to the window -- while I wanted to help her along in her decision by casting a "drop" spell on her. The spell functioned, thankfully. But, then, Djon ruined the moment by, again, opening fire on her. I became terrified for the children's safety -- and, indeed, the woman took just the action anticipated of a solitary enemy afraid that she would not be treated well, and grabbed for her weapon and the girl to hold her hostage. I am uncertain if Djon, at this point, showed only a total lack of judgment, or just a well-earned confidence in his abilities as a marksman -- he took the shot, and winged the Imperial woman.

Seeing that the Imperial soldier was now desperate, I took the safe shot. Knowing that a magic dart could not hit the innocent, I let one loose, killing the Imperial.

Meanwhile, the farmer and his wife were found and two other Imperials were killed in other parts of the house after they likewise refused surrender.

I see this mission as a failure because Imperial scouts would have had much useful information. If this terrible tendency to shoot first and ask for surrender last gets out, the Stockboys will lose some of their own ability to negotiate for fair treatment under the rules of war. I expect Reinhold will discipline Djon for endangering the hostages with his trigger-happy approach.

Sessions #3–5: R&R (Rites & Rituals)

The northeastern Bretonnian town of Sevigny is a bustling hub at the moment, with Marienburg refugees drifting in from the east and Bretonnian soldiers on their way to fight the Empire. And it's just a few days until the Day of Mystery, a holy day which honors Saint Morr (or just Morr, to those who worship the Old Gods), though it's hard to know whether that will mean any sort of accompanying festivities here, as the Bretonnian tradition around the holiday is much more somber -- go to church, light candles to honor dead relatives, and so forth -- whereas Marienburg tradition tends to be more festive.

The nation of Marienburg isn't expected to hold out much longer, and at any rate is lacking the funds to continue to pay massive numbers of mercenaries. So Commander Luchetti has headed to the city of Couronne to negotiate a new contract for the Brotherhood of St. Ranald, this time with the Bretonnians.

There are a few units of the Brotherhood still engaged in the fight for Marienburg, but the Stockboys are one of the squads that is on leave until Luchetti has a new assignment for

them, and are cooling their heels in Sevigny until they get word from the commander.

(Most of them, anyway. Sabin has been temporarily reassigned to Lieutenant Aerwyn's still-active unit, as their healer had been on the wrong end of an artillery blast. And Sergeant Durand has gone along with Luchetti, confident that the Bretonnians will be more enthusiastic than the Marienburgers were about his ideas for flooding the Marienburg lowlands to impede the Empire's advance.)

Yelenalka's diary [from session 03]

Entry from the last day of Fore-Mystery in 3014
Sevigny, Bretonnia

Dear Diary,

While Commander Luchetti negotiates a contract with the Bretonnian government, we were given a few days off in the small city of Sevigny, in the northeast of Bretonnia. Things are very busy here, between arriving Westerland refugees, and Bretonnian soldiers being quartered on their way to the front. But we managed to get rooms at the Armes de Pégase.

On our first day, Reinhold's pocket was picked by some beggar, and Reinhold became angry. Well, the city was not in the mood to see an angry Imperial, so we had to cover for him and keep him out of sight.

Later on, after the murder investigation had begun (I'm getting to that, I promise), Kargun -- who has a good eye -- saw the beggar and cornered him. Others in our group circled, while Reinhold extracted his missing money. Then the beggar started calling for help -- I guess he did a quick calculation, and decided that local dirty thief trumps Imperial nationale in public sympathy. Since I didn't want nearby the crowd to misunderstand the Lieutenant's anger and work to arrest Reinhold, I quickly pulled back and played that the beggar had insulted my honor, and that the gentlemen in my party were protecting me. In the end, the beggar was arrested -- though if I don't press charges they will only hold him for 24 hours. That seems fair to me -- and, on the plus side, there's at least one beggar safe from crazed killers. (Not to hold you in suspense, my dear Diary, but the bits about the crazed killer are still forthcoming.)

Kargun wanted to see the chorus girls dance, and so of course the boys Reinhold and Djon went as well. Sophia and I had to watch them, and keep them from getting into trouble. I suppose that they have been tolerant of hat shopping, so Sophia and I have to let them ogle local girls now and again. The music was loud, and the girls were shameless. The chorus girls' show was -- according to the girls themselves -- not up to par. Apparently because one of their number -- the "prettiest," a girl with the stage name La Belle -- had been murdered in a gruesome fashion by some sicko client the night before. I think Lucie, the one who Kargun was so eager to comfort, must have found La

Belle -- since she was able to describe the scene in some gory detail.

While we were out some nice Bretonnian soldiers (the same ones who suggested that there was room at the Armes de Pégase) brought Sophia and me out to go dancing at a club called "Mains de Jazz." The boys came with us (I think that they were a little jealous and protective of Sophia). Markgraf Vondul and his Dwarf Jazz orchestra were performing -- Belyr Korudorn was a special guest on saxophone and blew the joint sky-high with his solo! I was asked to dance a couple times, by soldiers that Sophia had rebuffed or who knew that she wouldn't give them the time of day, and we had a swinging time.

I guess that it's a good thing they all like Sophia. If any man began to fancy me, Baba Lukyana would know; and then she'd appear in a furious frozen wind, and turn him into an ice statue, screeching like a frostfiend the whole while. Sometimes it's just unfair that I have to be an ice maiden. I wonder what Dmirov is up to -- if not for Lukyana, we might well be living a nice quiet life with children at our feet. Still regrets never get anyone anywhere! I resolve to work twice as hard to become properly dour -- and then, hopefully I can pass quickly through the "Ice Maiden" stage of my career, become a proper witch, and finally marry. If Dmirov has already married, and I'm a witch, I could curse his wife and -- no, that's a bad idea. But if I were a witch of means, then there is no way the matchmaker would short-shrift me, and my parents would be so happy to have a proper match. Oh, but I digress, dear diary -- I promised you a tale of murder.

Well, the next day, today, right near the Armes de Pégase, there was a stir nearby (before I was up). There was a second grisly murder -- this time, of a wealthy man who had been sick in bed of a terminal illness, a Monsieur Aubergine. By the time I came on the scene, Kargun was calming the woman who had found the body -- his employee Anne-Sophie Martineaux.

A damsel in distress is too much for a dwarf to pass up. And so, apparently, is a mystery. Perhaps someone should write a string of adventure novels about Kargun and his merry band? Djon has some wit, and knows how to use a pen. So, next thing I knew, we were all looking for links between these cases. Each of the victims had been cut in ritualistic ways, that suggested a dark religion: On the man's body was a symbol depicting three lines protruding from a central point, with three circles between them. On the woman's body was a large circle, with a scored line extending from the circle to a smaller circle in the upper right, with a line crossing the score near the large circle.

The ladies of the night that Kargun has been hanging around all seem to think that it is the work of the religious zealot who protests their business -- Pierre Reynard. But, really, that guy seems loud but harmless.

This sort of dark rite reminded me of the brutal Norsca -- a vicious people who will skin and eat you as readily as I might eat a plum (which, by the way, is the most delicious fruit ever -- the Bretonnians are so spoiled, and I am so jealous!). In the bibliothèque, examining a book describing Norsca religious rites, it suggested that their dark rites are to

a force of Chaos known as the “four-in-one.” The four aspects of this Chaos are identified as “lust and sensuality” “disease and decay” “war and blood” and “change and mystery.” It’s a long shot, but it struck Djon and me that perhaps the first victim had been sacrificed to the “lust” aspect, and the second had been sacrificed to the “disease” aspect. If this reasoning is correct, it suggests that there are sacrifices to “change” and “war” still to come (or, perhaps, already happened before we arrived -- but we found nothing in the obituaries).

With the Moment of Mystery upon us in two nights -- Midnight, when the two moons are both full at the same moment -- it seems perfect timing for a Chaos nut -- four murders, culminating in the moment of full moons. Not that this helps us determine who is responsible. I wonder if the nut is “for real” -- whether his magic will work some terrible ritual on the city (like the tales of lost Bogenhafen), or if he’s just a sicko.

Odds are that it’s political and related to the war. Since, well, everything is related to the war. What would that vicious Norsca bastard Jarl-King Dalmar Hammerskold want with blood rites in Bretonnia? No doubt, it’s because of the Bretonnia-Kislev alliance, and he has his rapacious hungry Norsca eye on the good people of Kislev.

So how do we catch him?

There are too many people who might be sacrificed in the name of “chance” or “deception” to know who to protect -- gamblers, wizards, spies, lawyers. There are a fair number of people here who might be sacrificed in the name of “war” or “bloodshed” -- any of the soldiers billeted in town, or maybe even a ritual suicide by the nutter himself. We can’t really deduce who will be targeted next -- so we’d better try and figure out who is responsible directly. And probably before Midnight tonight.

The best idea I’ve heard would be to set an ambush. Who mentioned the idea? Was that Reinhold, Sophia or Djon’s idea? We all sort of talked about it. But should the bait be set for “chance” or for “war?” If the former, I could set Djon up with a glowing light and he could easily make himself sound like a haughty foreign wizard -- muttering to himself about “Meta-studies,” “pseudo-arcane admixtures” and “neo-classical spellcrafting.” If the latter, Reinhold just has to get a little drunk and stumble about being himself.

No, wait, the Norsca would want good relations with the Empire. I wish that Robert were here -- he would be a great Bretonnian soldier walking the streets alone, rather than Reinhold. Which would really be better, because if Reinhold is acting all Imperial he probably would get beaten up by any local resident. Well, if Kargun is brave enough to dangle off the side of a bridge he’s planning to blow up, I know that he’ll step up to do this! And yes, Diary, I know that a Kislevite Ice Maiden in training would be more certain “change” bait than a pseudo wizard from the Border Princes -- but I just couldn’t bear being made vulnerable to a predatory Norscan Jarl-serving Chaos-worshipping bastard, since we know the terrible crimes worse than murder which they are prone to subject Kislevite women (and men) to.

Anyhow, maybe I'll start writing that series of detective novels, with a main character inspired by Kargun. I'll let you know how that goes.

Alright, Diary, I've got to go!

Yelenalka's diary [from session 04]

Entry from Fore-Mystery in 3014
Sevigny, Brettonia

Dear Diary,

Kargun's investigations have continued, but no real break has come in the case. There was a third murder, but I'll get to that.

First, we bought a wizard's hat for Djon -- which he never wore, but that's because Sabin surprised us by showing up in the hat shop just as we made our purchase, and he already looks like a wizard or agent of change.

We started out trying to get some more information on the victims. We found LaBelle's real name -- Imraavandrelan. Yeah, I know, but it's an elf name and what can you do? We were mostly looking to see if anything about the two victims really stood out -- whether they were prime candidates for the killer who had been marked in advance, or victims of opportunity. It turns out that, looking at the police blotters and news stories, Monsieur Aubergine was far from the most sick or most well-known sick person in town; and LaBelle (er, Imraavandrelan) does not appear to have actually been the biggest slut in town (though she was clearly in the running).

So, having decided that the villain was likely looking for victims of opportunity, we decided to go ahead with operation "create a couple potential victims." That night, we had Sabin dressing like normal for Sabin, and Reinhold wander about acting his rough-tough soldierly self. Meanwhile Sophia and I tracked Reinhold, Kargun and Djon tracked Sabin, and Djon/Kargun and Sophia/I kept sight of each other's teams.

Well, it seems that Sevigny is really just a hive of scum and villainy. This time, it was Sophia whose pocket was picked -- and she ran off to catch the thief. I think that I hit him with a "drop" spell, but he must have resisted it. Anyhow, eventually Sophia joined back.

Seeing nothing by 1 or 2 AM, we went back to the rooms. Though Reinhold said that he thought he had seen some small frog-like creature moving fast nearby; and Sabin reported seeing the same sort of thing. We chalked it up to nerves -- but it turns out (as you shall learn soon, dear diary), that there was truth to the sighting!

So, that morning, we started looking and listening for a sign of who had been murdered the night before (since we had anticipated one). Considering our worries about cash (with

every damn Bretonnian apparently being a thief), a desire to get some vacation in, and a desire to pal around with locals and get some more information about the mystery, we decided to run an ice cream stand.

The ice cream stand went over very well. Djon is an amazing salesman, and Sophia is like the best cook ever! We made back our investment, and then several gold beyond that! So I think we're doing OK on expenses. But the day at the ice cream stand was no day at the beach -- we were among the first to see the body.

Some of the kids by the beach found the body. So, while the rest of us manned the store, Djon went to check. Then he came back and got me. The rest of us went to see the body, while Djon manned (and started packing up) the stand. The body was that of the beggar who had been imprisoned the day before -- which makes us wonder how he got out of his jail cell, or if a member of the police may be involved in this crime. The peculiar sounds and movements from the beggar, that Reinhold had noted the earlier day, were related to his having a mutant face on his shoulder. The body had a new extra chaos-y carved symbol on it, like a wriggly tadpole with a giant circle cut out in the head. The symbol had been carved straight on the chest, and the shirt pulled back on -- the shirt was blood-soaked, but not cut or torn in a struggle. We figured that this sacrifice was "change." It also had the stink and aura of chaos magic done -- so this was an actual evil spell, rather than just a knife-wielding loon.

At a certain point, Sabin went to get the cops -- since it may have looked strange if the same group that got him arrested yesterday were the first to find the body. Was it just coincidence that he had been following us around? If it's not an accident, maybe the next and last victim will be someone murderous who had been nearby us -- like the religious zealot Pierre Reynard.

Anyhow, not knowing how else to approach this case, we decided to go out "very-fast-frog hunting." We went around, looking for a sight of that little green thing that Sabin and Reinhold had imagined.

And surprise, surprise, we found it!!! It was a small round squig-like beast, very fast and just plain nasty. We got it cornered, and Kargun (ever awesome) managed to catch it. We brought it back to the room. Sophia found that it liked cheese and ice cream. I found that it had an aura of otherworldly chaos magic, and determined that it was a small summoned demon. It seems to understand, or at least recognize, the arcane language of Magik. Well, since Sevigny is not quite so large and corrupt a city as Guisoreaux or Quenelles, we figured that the odds were pretty high that it would be the work of the same evil wizard type.

We managed to get it into a harness, and attached to a chain, so we can try to cajole it to lead us to its master. Of course the stupid thing bit me, and I felt a bit sick.

If the frog-thing doesn't bring us to the killer, what do we do next? Seek out Reynard to see if he is attacked? Try to set up a swap/exchange with the owner, so we get him out to

retrieve his frog? If we did so, would we take out a personal ad “missing an ugly frog with a venomous bite?” Or just try to get out of town by Midnight?

Yelenalka’s diary [from session 05]

Entry from early After-Mystery in 3014
On the road outside of Sevigny, Bretonnia

Dear Diary,

Kargun, that cad, is going to get us all killed.

Alright, Kargun simply went missing. At first we didn’t worry about it -- he’s a big boy, and he didn’t go missing near Midnight or anything.

Anyhow, after lots of wasted effort trying to get “Paco” (the demon we captured) to take us to its leader, I gave up. I went, with Sabin, to check out the police station. But Reinhold, Djon and Sophia continued to try and work with the beast.

I explained that I was ready to press charges against the beggar “Claude” -- in order to try and get a gander at any record or sense about what had happened to Claude before he was found mutilated. This gave us a chance to gander over the log with the officer on duty -- and see that he was “released” at 10 PM by Officer Chaban (who would be back on duty at 8 PM). It sure looked likely that Chaban had been responsible for the murder of Claude, and had entered the “release” in the books.

Next I got back, and saw them still fussing with the demon. It was clear that it wasn’t going to be of assistance -- and that as a spy for our adversary it was more dangerous. So I suggested that we bring it on a trip to the “farm.” We did so, and Sophia shot it -- whence it disincorporated to return to the Warp.

After this, we split into three groups -- agreeing to meet back at the police office at 8:00. Reinhold and Djon went bar-hopping, looking for Kargun. Meanwhile, Sabin went to get his fortune read; which suggested some terrible fate involving ropes befalling Kargun. And Sophia and I patrolled near the border to the Marienburg refugees, in case thugs come looking to capture an officer -- but we got nowhere.

And this is how Kargun cost us another vital asset -- Djon’s drunkenness meant that by the time we met up later, it became clear we’d have to send him back to the hotel in a cab. So Djon went back.

By 8:00, we met back up at the station. I confronted Officer Chaban about having released the beggar. Then Sophia hit on a genius plan -- and she started screaming that Reinhold was assaulting her. Eventually, this got Reinhold thrown in jail. And then we left.

I watched the jail, while Sophia and Sabin got supplies at the room. Sabin failed to put together an agent that would weaken or cut the bars of the jail window, and it was getting late, so he returned with a couple of Kargun's grenades.

Another gent left the jail -- who had probably been an alternate sacrifice before they got their hands on Reinhold, and they chose to release him. Sophia, however, being unable to resist a handsome looking man, decided to stalk him about town. I'm not sure how, but this is probably also Kargun's fault; without Sophia, Sabin and I had to stop the rite and save the Lieutenant by ourselves.

Sabin and I watched the jail. Other people entered, including a couple who looked familiar; the madam from the brothel, and the fellow who had been Auberjonois's lawyer. I could sense something magically "wrong" on the Auberjonois's lawyer.

Then the lights in the front of the police station went out. And I could detect a big, big magic in the department -- like a ritual circle. So, Sabin and I began to worry for Reinhold. We took a look at the bolted back door. . . And I begin working on the locks with "magic darts." I cast the spell about 10 times (though successfully only about 6 times), before we finally opened the door. I did have a terrible and foreboding sense of the abyss that is chaos -- but I managed to shrug it off.

Sadly, once we had that door open, another "Paco" bounded in past us (according to Sabin -- I never saw it). As we travelled through the dark, I occasionally stopped to sense magic and orient ourselves to the area where the ritual was going on -- in the cells. Just outside the door to the cells, I cast a chill (to make casting easier), and Sabin kicked open the door.

Well, then everything got crazy! Reinhold was in the middle of the cell, on the floor, unarmed and being beaten by the lawyer, two police (one of whom was Chaban) and the madam. The lawyer produced a handful of "Pacos" from his coat. And the madam kept giving people the evil eye that made them woozy during the fight. I saw the ritual dagger in Chaban's hands, I think I cast the drop spell twice -- once on someone's gun, and once on the ritual dagger -- and I cast the magic dart spell a bunch of times (though to little effect). Meanwhile Sabin tossed the grenades, and grabbed a gun; Chaban, the madam and Reinhold were knocked out and dying in the cell. But the lawyer got the keys to the cell and opened the door, and started (with the remaining officer) chasing Sabin and me. Sabin was nearly killed by a knife-slash at the base of his spine, and I thought I was a goner after being shot a couple times and other bullets were whizzing by. But a "magic dart" flew right and took down the lawyer.

I fashioned a sledge, and brought Reinhold and Sabin to the park -- where I made a leaf fort in a hidden grove, until (thank goodness) they could move. Then we fled the town as quickly as possible -- lest we be linked to the massacre at the police station! In any case, we now have a couple pistols and a crazy evil knife (which probably should be melted down somewhere -- Sabin will know where, since that's a dwarf thing).

So where was Kargun this whole while that we were risking our lives? He was in the whore-house! Surprise, surprise! His commanding officer, Lieutenant Kriegspiel, nearly lost his life, Private Sabin was likewise at Death's door; and only Saint Ranald and the Widow let me survive the brutal fight after being shot twice, when Auberjonois's lawyer started closing on me.

Session #6: No Man's Land – No recap for this session, which involved an enemy plane sent to bomb a recent field of battle with a strange green gas that caused the dead to rise as zombies. However, there is a flyer associated with this adventure, which I believe Chris may still have.

Sessions #7–9: Shell Shock

Yelenka's diary [first entry from session 07]

Entry from mid Chill-Month, 3014:

Who would have thought that in such an ugly and dreary place, I would be able to glimpse such beauty as I did? Stress and discomfort sharpens one's senses, it seems; and this must also apply to magical senses.

We were sent to the trenches in Bretonnia. It amounts to a whole lot of boredom and discomfort, followed by momentary fear and excitement. Lt. Col. Tahldreethal (yes, that's his name -- I have no idea what motivated Elven parents to so torment their offspring) didn't seem to expect us, so had Private Bunbury (a very pleasant halfling) escort us to a thinly defended section of the line. There we met Private Drok Boneburner, an orc who was actually less unpleasant than a typical Kislevite chekist -- a little uncouth, but a good nature that more than made up for it.

Ice magic was surprisingly helpful. There was a mound of buried mustard gas which, in order to render it further inert, I placed in a cold zone. The Protection from Rain spell also helped tremendously. On casting the Protection from Rain, I was treated to a rare and enticing glimpse at raw magik. But more on that elsewhere.

Eventually, our reverie was shattered by a terrible noise from the fog . . . To our surprise, it was an Imperial experimental weapon modeled on a folktale! Yes, the damn thing looked and drove just like a "Skaven Doomwheel" from a storybook! Is the Empire trying to fly a most ludicrous false flag when they use unnatural weapons (as they apparently did, in the Sylvanian plane used for the necromantic gas; which I thankfully missed, when training in the North)? Are they hoping to scare the very foolish, or shake the brave hearts of the Bretonnian soldiers? Or are the Imperial scientists simply mad, wanting to make their devices look like children's toys?

In any case, the terrible device maneuvered as well as a motorbike, and shot bolts of electricity, which really was terrifying! It dashed in and out of the fog, taking shots at our people. I did all I could think of -- I hid behind a fallen tree outside of the trench, closer to the fog line, from the hopes that I could cast "drop" on the driver next time he came out to maneuver, and make him crash. Sadly, the stubborn willful Imperial resisted my spell -- though perhaps his recognition that I had almost made him lose control is why he came out of the fog no more.

I stayed in position, ready should it come out of the fog again. But Djon and Sophia bravely ventured into the fog to find the thing. They could not find the device, but snuck so far through the fog, that they spotted the enemy line through the fog! Sophia and Djon both shot at the Machine gunner, and injured him (Sophia knocking the crest off of the Machine gunner's helmet), and ran back to the fog! But the strange "Doomwheel" was lost -- until Sophia found a track, and saw that it had retreated back behind the enemy lines.

Looking at the sturdy construction of the device (I'll grant the Imperial Hun this, they know their engineering), coupled with its maneuverability, I think it could have done much more damage than it did. I was expecting it to make a leap into the trench line, and to roll through crushing supplies and forcing us out -- it could easily kill if deliberately rolling over soldiers. What made the driver so cautious? Fear that the bubbling, frothing, shaking engine might blow? A short time-frame in which to operate? Fear of losing the prototype? Personal pilot cowardice? Orders to shake our morale rather than break the line?

While Djon and Sophia continued to play blind-man's bluff with the "Doomwheel," a flare was fired behind enemy lines -- probably as a signal to the driver, or to the enemy artillery. We could hear an artillery shot whistling through the air, so I abandoned my frozen spot in the open and pulled back to our trench. A good thing too, as a package landed squarely in the center of my frozen circle! The package started to leak gas -- Sabin tells me we were lucky it landed there, as the cold helped slow the advance of the gas.

The Empire went all out to go with their "Skaven" theme. This strange gas (which still needs to be analyzed by the chemists) even glowed green like the Skaven warpstone poisons in the books. Does the Mad Mootish Emperor imagine himself to be a King of Rats? Is he really trying to model his army on fairy-tale creatures? Is he building warpstone-traced weapons? Does the Mootish Kaiser fancy himself a mad pagan Norscan?

Yelenalka's diary [second entry from session 07]

The Widow has been overprotective in Kislev; shielding us from the raw beauty and power which is magik in its pure form. The magic she delivers us may be cleaner, but could it possibly be as beautiful as the raw magik I saw today? Is the Widow only over-concerned for us, or does she prevent us from basking in magik's glow for other reasons,

like jealousy? No matter; outside of Kislev I can see colors of magik that burn brighter and truer than any we see in frozen Kislev.

This is probably why Baba Lukyana ordered me south -- with the unfiltered magik I can learn so much more! I am finally motivated to undertake the long exercises and deprivations -- I will forswear marriage, and become a maiden, and now have the strength of will needed to practice attuning the aether -- before the Winter solstice I hope to double my connection to the raw unfiltered magic of this realm, and I surely will have such power before the Witching Night. Then I will have sufficient power to harness the most beautiful and unpredictable elements of the magical winds.

Hysh, Chamon, Ghyran, Azyr, Ulgu, Shysh, Aqshy, Ghur, Qhaysh and Dhar are as shadows to the brilliance of the impossible color behind it all. I will never forget this glimpse; and shall strive to see it more plainly. I shall work hard to gain the power needed to widen the conduit to raw magik beyond a mere pinhole.

Yelenalka's diary [from Session 8]

From Chill-Month, 3014
Bretonnia

[Written in Kislevite]
Entry from Fore-Mystery in 3014

Over past few days I have taken it on myself to determine nature of Bretonnian command, our situation, and what we can expect over next days.

Tahldreethal commands the Battalion in which we have been embedded. This section of the trench line has suffered many injuries recently, from increased shelling. Probably a sign that the Imperial command is getting ready to charge the line, and why they wanted reinforcements. Shouldn't we have a machine gun here?

The Empire's army has certainly been active on this front. Someone in the Reik command may think this is either a weak point, or a point which they could easily hold and use as a gateway to Guisoreux; given the sheer number of experimental weapons deployed in this region, in the form of gas attacks and experimental fairy-tale weaponry.

Or maybe a number of mad engineers and wizards have decided to pick the company camp across the way for testing zone weapons they hope to perfect and produce for use elsewhere in the war -- maybe simply because of nearness of Nuln and number of Imperial Wizards with University of Nuln.

Bunbury says in addition to the infantry along the trench line in either direction, artillery at our backs, dressing station and supply depot, Tahldreethal keeps a Pegasus in the stables nearby.

The Lieutenant in charge of this platoon, Lapierre, was badly injured from shell before we arrive. Bunbury says that he expects Lapierre to be rotated out soon; then grumbled something about his own tour of duty being extended longer than expected. The Lieutenant normally reports to Captain Fontaine, a bit further up the trench -- until brevet Lieutenant is established we present the Stockboys to Fontaine for inspection.

Drok is almost as new to this front trench as we, so hasn't added much. But Bunbury has been here for well past a normal shift. He's from Lesparre-Saône, and is one of the few representatives from the Bunbury clan that was eligible to fight, so joined a number of other young men from Lesparre-Saône; but most of them have been rotated out, injured or killed.

Fortunately, over the past few days we have not experienced another shelling. Well, except for Kargun and Robert trying to devise improved shells; which led to lots of explosions and experiments. They seemed very proud of their work, and their work in finding ranges of the Imperial Machine Gun turret across the way -- and in fact got the Bretonnian artillery to shell the gunner there to good effect. Of course the any advantage that may have been gained was lost, because the engineers did not coordinate with the team to make sure that we would be ready to charge the enemy trench. What a waste.

Drok and the Lieutenant got into a wrestling match, and there was quite a betting pool. I put a couple Lira on Drok, but when I saw that Djon was betting on the Lieutenant I changed my bet. In the end, the two were so evenly matched that a draw was called and the bets were returned. I will say, just between us, dear diary, that Drok's green complexion and rippling muscles were not unattractive, when exerting himself in the match -- under no circumstances can I breathe a word of this simple aesthetic opinion to Sophia, for she would take it the wrong way and would not let me hear the end of it.

The most excitement was born from Sophia's impatience. She decided to go AWOL. Which led to a great deal of drama, and Djon being sent to bring her back alive. The Lieutenant is the soul of forgiveness, for not having Sophia shot on the spot. He seemed to willfully accept the claim that she had undertaken a reconnaissance mission -- and scolded her to not embark on such a mission again without orders or leave. Hopefully the stress will not so move her again, because Reinhold's patience is limited.

In any case, Djon and Sophia found in the nearby village that after recent shelling there were several instances of mutation. Which means that the Empire has warpstone, and has decided to weaponize it for use in our section of the front, and against civilians no less. On request from the Lieutenant, Djon brought a nearby furry and many-eyed mutant refugee to our camp; Henri confirmed that the mutations began recently after shelling. We fed the poor thing; and I expect that shortly our entire team will go back to the village, to seek the source of the mutations and look for ways to cleanse the area.

Yelenka's diary [from Session 9]

From Chill-Month, 3014
Bretonnia

We have some more idea about those Imperial gas attacks. We had cause to believe that there was a source of warpstone or mutagen in the area of the village of Anse, from sightings of mutants in the area. Lieutenant Kriegspiel ordered most of us to investigate -- which most were more than happy to do, since the trenches are such dreary and bad-smelling places.

As we approached the village, I noted that the background chaos was much higher than normal. And then we heard the shout, and started running for the village. Just as we rounded the crest of the hill, we saw three mutants (two with blood on their faces) hiding behind outbuildings and trying to run, as a posse of villagers closed on them. With the sound of the shotgun blast from one of the non-mutants, we closed quickly.

Reinhold ran to the outskirts of the fight, calling out to make them lay down their weapons. On seeing the reaction to the Lieutenant's Reikish accent, Djon added that we were a mercenary group working with the Bretonnian army. I'm a bit quicker on my feet than the Lieutenant, and made it to the center of the conflict, and called for a halt to the hostilities. I fired my pistol once into the air, to gather attention and authority and as a warning to the mutants.

My efforts at bringing order did little -- though the presence of strange forces with a Reikish commander drew the villagers' attention away from the mutants, and to us. Kargun, Reinhold and I ended up presenting papers and describing our commission to the villagers, while Sophia and Djon pursued the mutants. Though they remained apprehensive, they seemed to accept our authority.

The villagers had not quite realized that the mutants in their midst were from their own numbers. And had been distraught to see two of them tucking into a live cow. Can't say as I blame them for being upset and frightened of the mutants. I informed them of the background presence of chaos, and the danger of staying so close to such shelling; and suggested that with medical care their fellow villagers may be saved from future mutation.

Eventually Sophia and Djon came back with one of the mutants. We began the process of restoring peace, when Lieutenant Colonel Tahldreethal appeared on a pegasus and Bretonnian dress-troops came over the hill. In our report, we each downplayed the number of mutants while feeling out whether or not Tahldreethal would get them medical attention. The presence of the pegasus restored a lot of confidence -- the children were excited, and the adults saw it as a sign that the higher command was concerned for the safety of the village.

The villagers were asked to gather up their possessions, and march to HQ for relocation. Meanwhile Sophia convinced the other mutants to come back for medical attention and aid.

There was some other cleanup duty. For example, I worked with a cartographer to chart the limits of the chaos radiation.

Finally, we made our way back to the trench. And despite it having been only two days -- during which most of our time was away from the trench -- Sophia became increasingly bitter and insubordinate, and generally lowered morale. Finally, I cajoled her into working with me to make some ice cream -- which settled her mind a bit. With the palettes, and the blankets, and enough foodstuffs, we may be able to keep warm and dry enough, and get enough for Sophia to cook to keep her mind busy, that she can wait out the rest of our assignment here without being shot for insubordination; hopefully the assignment won't be more than a couple months . . .

Yelenalka's Diary [from between Sessions 9 and 10]

From Gilles-Tide, 3014
Bretonnia

Dear Diary

Things have become much more regular at the line, here. We've had a regular sense of duty, and eventually even Sophia acclimated to the work and danger. Gas attacks have been coming with such frequency that both the Bretonnian army and Saint Randal's company have begun issuing gas-masks as part of the regular kit. Reinhold attended some strategy session with some bigwigs, reporting on our own experiences with the gas; maybe Bunbury is right that the command has no idea what it's doing -- they should have asked our doctor and chemist, Sabin, to present. Or perhaps, since part of the discussion was about where the Empire was getting such quantities of Warpstone, they should have called me in as a magical consultant; I could have offered several reasonable possibilities not involving Skaven (yes, in fact one of the command floated the idea that it was ROUSes). I think that, given their monopoly on it, Nuln University could have accumulated much more warpstone over the years than anyone imagines; the Norscans have mines in the Chaos Wastes, and the leaders of the Reik could have a deal with them; There is a Warpgate within the Empire, hidden beneath magical wards in the Mootish city of Townsville; and, for that matter, warpstone could be magically mined from the moon.

Anyhow, the Raiders (you remember the arrogant jerks from prior entries, dear diary) somehow or other managed to get all the glory, from being in the right place at the right time and actually seeing what any sensible person could have deduced: that the Empire was fielding a halfling unit to handle the Warp weapons, because of their resistance to chaos. The Raiders get the plum assignments, and somehow or other on the rare

occasions that they can see the obvious they get a special medal for it! The Mootlanders make up the 103rd Battalion -- though their commander is a human named Colonel Riefenstahl. Sorry, named "Riefenstahl" and titled "Colonel." Their long boring report only mentioned one other name from the 103rd Battalion clearly -- Erich Honeydew; probably a halfling name.

I guess that eventually the Bretonnians decided to stop paying mercenaries to do the work for which they can draft their own citizens, when this work has required relatively little of our expert ability. We are finishing up here within a month or two, and then will be on some sort of mission with the Albion navy. My understanding is that we are going to Kislev -- though sadly to the far West in Erengard, far from my home. In any case, I look forward to hearing the rich tones of the Kislev language, and having good Kislevite cooking. I'm certain that the journey will be a dangerous one -- after we make our way to the Albion blockade at the mouth of the Sea of Claws, there will be Norscan chaos-warriors coming and going by ship North of us, and Imperial battleships South of us making their way West to run the blockade or making their way East to raid Erengard.

I apologize, dear diary, that most of my entries have been getting shorter -- but here in the trenches the days start to resemble one another after a couple weeks. Soon, though, I'll be able to write all about a boat ride, and the city of Erengard!

[Additional information from between Sessions 9 and 10:]

Sophia recalls the name Erich Honeydew making the Mootland papers, must be about twenty years back. He was a scientist who had made great strides in energy production. For a time, Townsville experienced a booming industrial sector. But then Honeydew was arrested and imprisoned by those damn Imperials, and the factories he'd outfitted shut down. The full details never came to light, but apparently he was blamed for the illness and death of some humans living in Townsville. Odd, though, you're fairly certain he had been given a life sentence.

Session #10: The Slithergadee Has Crawled Out of the Sea

Yelenalka's Diary [from Session 10]

From Fore-Witching, 3014
The Sea of Claws

Dear Diary,

Our time in the trenches has been short. It was unpleasant -- wet, cold, frightening, and boring -- but not really as bad as people say. At front lines, you wait in a hole in the ground -- in Czarist Kislev, hole in ground waits for you. Two months, and it doesn't look like we'll be cycled back anytime soon. I suppose that the Bretonnian command,

reasonably, decided to rotate out draftees for those positions rather than paying highly paid professionals.

We were ordered to report to a large Merchant-Marine vessel belonging to Albion, named the HMS *Kettering*. The ship is planning a run through the Sea of Claws -- between the Reik's navy and the Norscan raiders -- to Erengard, loaded with supplies; and we are to be travelling with them. Reinhold was given sealed orders, for him to open after we had settled in Erengard.

Sabin is bringing a large crate of dirt, contaminated by the chemical weapons used. Presumably to keep researching and to share information with the Kislevite scientists.

We're all being asked to do some work on the journey. Sophia has been complaining about the state of the kitchen.

...

From Fore-Witching, 3014
The Sea of Claws

Dear Diary,

The journey has proceeded apace. We got into the Sea of Claws, and have so far managed to avoid both Imperial warships and Norscan raiders. Sabin has been very sea-sick. We only ever see him at dinner in the evenings, and he doesn't really eat then.

...

From Fore-Witching, 3014
The Sea of Claws

Journal:

Today was a difficult day. We have lost a great deal to this war, and it is clear that the costs will only mount.

We saw a warning on the reef -- a Norscan ship crashed upon the reef. We didn't know what it meant, but the Captain of the ship wisely let it stand and avoided coming close.

As mentioned before, we are trying to avoid both Imperial forces and Norscans. The Reik is considered a greater danger than the Norscans, so we traveled closer to the Norscan shore on the Sea of Claws. I was on watch in the crow's nest.

The boat was suddenly, unexpectedly tossed. And great claws could be seen surrounding the boat from below. There was a great deal of confusion, as a beak or something pierced the hull below, and shots were firing above. After I got down from the crow's nest, I,

personally, was thrown about a bit by one of the claws; it was foolish of me, but I stood near to cast "Chill" on it, so as to try and drive the thing away.

There was talk of heading to the lifeboats, but of course there was concern that they would look like even better targets than the *Kettering*. And this is when I saw something that gave my heart hope. As I have written before I know that flirtation cannot be taken seriously, for men never flirt with the girls that they intend to marry. But today, I saw Djon on the floor below, standing in the midst of a great decision. Clearly, the lieutenant had ordered him to help bail the hold, but his eyes caught mine as I lay dazed on the ship -- and he stood struggling. His fight with himself over his duty to his oath and his commander, and where his heart pulled him to save me, left him paralyzed like Count Vronsky in Turstoi's book . . . Suddenly I knew what had been in front of my eyes all along. There, he looked as handsome and perfect as Dotryevski's Alyoshka -- and I saw a glimpse of perfect happiness.

The beast withdrew as quickly as it appeared. The ship engineers, with assistance from Kargun and Robert, managed to seal the hole and start the pumps. By dinner-time people were worn. But wondering if perhaps love had found me, I instead tested my theory with Sophia -- asking her if she thought that Djon fancied her. Her response was a blushing denial, which helped me determine that I had, perhaps, seen too much in Djon's eyes.

Joe Taylor, one of the deckhands, who had been seen after the attack, didn't show up for dinner, and so a search of the vessel was begun by several of the crew, including Kargun and Reinhold (who had finished dinner early). I returned to my cabin, to consider a response to Djon, when there was the sound of a shot in the hold. So I rushed down, hearing an explosion as I made my way down.

On arrival, there was a fight between several terribly fast insect-like creatures. On seeing their movements, as mindless creatures in an infestation, and not in anything that appeared nest-like, it became clear that the whole ship must be infested -- even as the beasts bit at and busted a couple of Robert's ribs. And suddenly, I knew just why the Widow had let me see a glimpse of happiness.

I let go of any possible future happiness, then. I knew that duty must of necessity trump love -- for love is selfish and the world is dangerous, and only by adherence to one's word and duty can any of us survive. So then and there I swore my oaths to the Widow, and promised to emulate her, as any possibility of love died. Not long ago, I wondered if it might be possible to be a quick study as an Ice Maiden -- so that one could rush through the lessons and then marry before one was too old. But now I know that winter comes of its own pacing and its own time -- and to learn the Widow's heart I must accept eternal loneliness.

With that, the ice magic poured through me, and my spells came easier as we fought these beasts. My hope is that at least one of the others -- perhaps my best friend, Sophia -- would survive and find happiness in her family.

Eventually, a nest filled with a couple dozen was located -- in the engines, which necessitated action. The Captain was quite clear that no explosives or automatic weapons could be used in an assault, for we would not only be ruined but subject to torture if found dead in the water between the Reik and Norsca. Per the captain's suggestion, a means was found to build a smoke bomb. On my request, the ship engineer suggested three ducts or tubes through which the creatures might flee from the smoke . . . Robert, I must say, for all of his big talk about how his book learning might let him single-handedly build a weapon to end the war (despite never having been a gunsmith, or even apprenticed for a day with a smelter), he couldn't so much as come up with a way to cap the ducts we were worried about -- so much for book-learning as a sufficient ingredient for invention!

We were divided into groups to cover the possible exits, while Kargun and Djon threw the smoke grenade into the room.

At this point, I became rather disappointed with Kargun. He became the second example of a member of the Stockboys to border on insubordination, and using his age as an excuse all but ordered the captain to re-order his original assignments about who should be stationed where. Mostly because the dwarf didn't have the sense of duty or courage required of a soldier, and he counted a couple bruises as if they were injuries.

Lieutenant Kriegspiel did something truly admirable. He made it appear that he relented, to let the dwarf save face -- but in fact re-ordered the division of forces back to three at each point, changing only who would be keeping company with Kargun. It was like a dare to Kargun -- will you question the proper order of command a second time? That quieted Kargun down. Frankly, I was thankful to have Djon rotated out of fighting by my side -- I didn't want to be distracted by personal worries or fears for him.

After taking my oath did my heart become cold? Perhaps. If I were lieutenant, I would have ordered Kargun whipped for his insubordination. Instead, our commander relented. Was this the lesson that Lukyana wanted me to learn? That few Tilean mercenaries can have the honor or sense of duty which comes naturally to every last Kislevite soldier? In this, Djon is the exception that proves the rule -- he walks and talks like his own skin is all he cares about, but then he happily risks everything when something important is on the line.

Most of the beasts exited the soft point guarded by the lieutenant, and they dispatched the beasts as they exited. A few more had gotten away, and we have been hunting them down. The search continues. The body of Joe Taylor had been found, as was the body of Arthur Cafferty -- who had been on duty in the engine room before the creatures were discovered. The bodies were burned, and in a simple ceremony interred to the sea.

All of the others were jumpy for the remainder of the journey. Hopefully, in a couple days, we can make port safely in Erengard. It will be a strange homecoming for me.

[Additional information from between Sessions 10 and 11:]

The *Kettering* arrives in Erengard without further excitement, beyond perhaps a bit of dismay from some of the Stockboys upon nearing the port and seeing a few Norscan vessels in the harbor. But contrary to popular belief, not **all** Norscans are raiders or chaos cultists, and there is some trade between Norsca and Kislev; even more so now with the war making many other trade routes difficult or impossible.

You spend the next couple days helping unload the freight (less a few crates that were knocked overboard or damaged in an explosion). After you've finished unloading the *Kettering*, you prepare to take a train to the city of Kislev. However, there's a holdup getting Sabin's crate through customs. He (and any other characters who will be absent for the next session) stays behind to try to sort it out, and will catch up with you later in Kislev.

Sessions #11–12, 15–17: A Tilean Mercenary in Tzar Nicolai's Court

[Written in the arcane language of Magik on small slips of paper, and hidden in the sole of Yelena's left boot] [from Session 11]

From Arkamine, 3014
Kislev City

Dear Diary,

We are working to save the Tzar and his family, and by extension the nation of Kislev herself, from a wicked advisor who is trying to turn the noble Tzar against his own people. May the gods save Tzar Nikolai Rebikov, the Tzarina Ilsa Rebikov, and the heir Tzarevich Vassily Rebikov.

Shortly after arriving in Erengard, we arranged a train to Kislev city. Because of stricter import controls during the war, and our own limited budget for bribes and the like, most of our heavy weaponry was checked and sent back -- though Sophia still has a rifle, and Kargun managed to get some grenades through. When we left Erengard, Robert was trying to convince customs officials that the separate tubes from his mortar were used for drying laundry, and Sabin was trying to convince them that there was nothing unusual at all about his desire to transport large crates of dirt into the country.

After a three-day cross-country journey, we arrived in Kislev city. Meanwhile, the Lieutenant opened our orders -- to proceed without drawing attention to the house of one Miranda Davenport (whom I remembered as the Albionian ambassador to Kislev).

Deciding that heading straight to the ambassador's house would be a sure way to attract attention, we started out by getting a room, bathing and dressing, and spending the early part of the day at a travelling circus (Lars Nylund's Mobile Cirkus of the Strange and

Extra-ordinary!). Kargun showed great skill in winning me a beautiful stuffed bear -- though I have to give some credit to Djon who spent a great deal of time and money unsuccessfully tossing rings in an effort to win me the bear.

From Ambassador Davenport, we learned about the threat to the Tzar. She explained that “Baba” Radya, an uncouth hag witch, had managed to get the attention and ear of the royal family, because she was supposedly the first healer able to bring some real improvement and relief to the sick Tzarevich. But Baba Radya has been using her hold over the family to endanger the Tzarevich further by dismissing his doctors; and it is possible that Radya is keeping the boy in a permanent dependent state in order to increase her sway over the family.

Radya has been using her influence to climb the social ladder, destroy enemies, and to further her own decadent ends -- including heavy drinking and gambling. She has been counseling the Tzar to attempt a separate peace with the Reik, in part so as to strengthen the defense against Norscan attack from the North. Of course keeping the pressure off of the Reik would virtually guarantee them conquest in the West, after which they would surely turn their attentions East -- so Radya’s ideas are surely shortsighted (or perhaps even informed by significant bribes coming from the Empire).

The Chekists have been watching Radya closely. Perhaps there are elements in the Chekists who oppose her influence, and perhaps there are others who support her. But, in any case, she has been watched closely -- especially since an attempt on Radya’s life by one Irina Kudrova. Irina’s attempt occurred about a month ago, and she has since disappeared from public view.

It is interesting that the travelling circus, which has been in the city is owned by the Norscan Lars Nylund. Is there a connection between the circus, and Irina Kudrova?

With Chekists watching Radya, allies would be helpful. Allies who know how to reach Baba Radya out of sight of others, allies who know the schedule of the Chekists watching her, allies who can help provide material and distractions.

To the end of finding allies, Djon and Sophia went back to the Norscan circus (the enemy of my enemy is . . . well, still an uncouth rabid Norscan dog and murder-hobo intent on pillage and rape . . . but at least a rabid dog that may be set against this enemy of the Tzar) where Djon apparently has family in the circus (a sister Emina, and brother Anton). According to the two, a fire mage named Rudiger had been previously with the circus, but had left it back in Altdorf, at least temporarily, apparently both because Kislev rightly does not look kindly on men who cast magic, and because he needed to recharge or purify or somesuch before he would be able to cast a spell to cure Emina of her mutation (yes, she’s a mutant apparently -- it seemed impolite to ask, particularly because whatever her mutation is meant that her “show” was only open to men).

Rudiger had already cured another mutant, formerly “the Blue Dwarf,” Barik, who now works as the circus’s strong man. It seems unlikely that a circus mage could cure

mutation (and maybe Barik was a confederate wearing blue makeup), though if Rudiger has real magic it seems likely illusion (which at least would be helpful to the sufferer of mutation) or chaos (which would have worse side effects than any advantage accrued from the spell, and would suggest exactly why Rudiger is going back and forth between chaos-lovers from Norsca and chaos-lovers in the Reik).

Meanwhile, I went to an intellectual bar called "Raskolnikov's," disguised as a beatnik anarchist and follower of Dovetsky -- where by keeping the alcohol flowing to get a little information about Irina, I got some leads. Oleg (a goatee-sporting anarchist), Mishka (an anarchist with a far-too-pretentious hat), and Pyotr (who seemed to be there from the hopes that he could get the slut Mishka to sleep with him), claimed that the assassination attempt had been by dagger. This suggests that perhaps Irina didn't have much in the way of backing. Presently the cause du jour is their protestations about some members of the Duma being arrested and sent to the mines -- I suppose that these low-lifes would be much happier if the Tzar allowed his ministers to commit crimes against the nation with impunity? For other contacts, I determined that Irina's last place of employment was at the Ursun temple -- perhaps a disguised Djon speaking his pidgin Kislevite could probably safely ask about her, and her associates, at the temple.

In our quest for people who can get us closer to Radya, and may have a gripe, I wonder which doctors had been working for Tzarevich Vassily? What is the attitude of the Tzar's Sigmarite confessor to the witch? If Radya truly is a hag witch, then we have to be cautious in our approach -- the spirits she has enslaved could potentially warn her about an attack or otherwise protect her from harm.

Per my orders from Lieutenant Kriegspiel to "feel out which persons within the Tzar's household may be ready to take some risk to protect the Tzar from Baba Radya's influence," I have a report to make.

Of course my mission would have been much, much easier with an expense account so that I could have a decent gown, shoes, hat, stockings, corset, chemise, petticoats, belt, bag, makeup and perfume. Next time, for the sake of the mission, I shall have to request two or three hundred rubles.

But a girl does what a girl has to do. The best I could do was to take the appearance of a young lady who had been overseas in Tilea, whose return was harried and expensive, and who had not yet made it to her home estates or secured the letters of credit needed to purchase proper clothing. And that seemed to work.

By having the good sense to spend some time in line at the manicurists (but leaving before having to embark on such an expensive service, by claiming that the wait was making me late for another appointment), and getting a word into the right ear, I was introduced to Baroness Natalia Aisenyev. Natalia is a lovely noblewoman and sometime confidante of the Tzarina Ilsa Rebikov.

The Baroness is too well bred to complain in any overt way, but it is clear that she is hurt and insulted by the fact that she was turned out in favor of Baba Radya, after she had been the one to suggest that Baba Radya could do the Tzarevich Vassily some good. Natalia had heard about Radya's mystic powers from a distant associate, and had arranged for Radya to be summoned from some distant part of the Empire (troll country?), where Radya was a renowned healer.

Among the men at the salon was a dwarfish doctor Pavel Andreyev; perhaps a candidate to get the Tzarevich some proper medical treatment? Apparently he had offered his services to the Tzar's family, but been sent away by Radya. He is presently serving as a physiologist with the Military Medical Academy.

From discussions about Tzarevich Vassily's health, I learnt some more details. The symptoms have included weakness to the point of fainting, occasional paranoid episodes, sweats, shaking, trouble sleeping, and nightmares. The symptoms have lessened since Baba Radya started treating him; but some wonder if Radya's position has been so comfortable that she has been loath to bring the boy back to full health.

Also present was a fine young man, a young Rytzar named Dmitri Yakushkin. Even if he did not have such piercing blue eyes and such fine square shoulders, I knew I could trust him from his passionate, automatic defense of the Tzar. Dmitri recognized that Radya is a terrible menace, who must be banished from court; and he expressed his love and fears for young Vassily with great passion! I think he was a little bit self-conscious about his outburst, from how quickly he changed the subject when I asked him to explain the basis of his anger at Radya.

Also in the group was an unexpected figure: the dark Norscan ringleader of the circus, Lars Nylund. He had a lot of nerve, chatting and laughing with the Baroness. Apparently he has used Natalia's good and too-trusting nature to take advantage (not unlike Baba Radya, before). Nylund is trying to arrange for his circus to stage a performance in Geroyev Square – the great square just outside of Bokha Palace.

If we think that the Norscan dog is just trying to turn a quick profit from the display there, rather than planning a direct assault on the Tzar, perhaps we could use our contacts in the circus to use the circus as a cover for our own foray to take care of Baba Radya.

Yelenalka's Diary [from Session 12]

[Written in the arcane language of Magik on small slips of paper, and hidden in the sole of Yelena's left boot]

From Arkamine, 3014
Kislev City

Dear diary,

My goodness, so much has happened. Well, after my report to the group, about Natalia's salon, others started to give their reports.

Djon, I think, enjoyed his assignment a little too much for a supposed professional; even though he had gotten no real information of consequence from the Chekist agent, he lingered just a little too long over her name Tatiyana, and kept insisting how it would be for the good of the mission for him to cultivate a romance with Tatiyana -- and of course he hopes to do so using the only means at his disposal, lies and deception, by pretending to be an artist. Well, I suppose that all is for the best -- a low-born scoundrel and a high-born Chekist are sort of made for one another. He continues to run after Tatiyana like a loyal puppy, and surely is the laughing stock at the local Chekist watering hole when they are sharing stories.

The long and short of Sophia's tale -- and there was more long than short -- was that she had found the Chekist who was following Baba Radya (the woman who she later encouraged Djon to date, who refers to herself as Tatiyana), and confirmed that by the annoyance and disgust that Tatiyana showed when Baba Radya had slipped out the back of a bathroom from a drinking house (and thereby shaking both her tails). Sophia also stated that Baba Radya had been drinking because she had just nearly escaped being run down by a car -- which is all very interesting, and I will get to that shortly.

Our commander -- who, for reasons I do not entirely understand, I am tempted to start referring to as "Lieutenant Colonel Henry Braymore Blake" -- continues to look the other way at insubordination and failure to comply with orders. I guess that Baba Lukyana taught me one thing -- the importance of a chain of command. This time the culprit was Kargun, who rather than looking for local supplies kept playing with gunpowder. I guess it's OK -- we got a little spending cash from sale of fireworks (to that money-grubbing Norscan -- which is at least an improvement over the other-sorts-of-grubbing-that-other-Zza-do).

Well, we have all continued our investigations. If that is what you can call Djon's efforts to woo the Chekist. As I tried to explain, his efforts would almost certainly be better used attempting to seduce Baba Radya. If she is indeed be from troll country, they (men and women alike) have an interest in weasly men like Djon.

Sabin and Kargun met with Doctor Andreyev. He seems an ally, though a timid one. Reinhold, Robert and I went to the Ursine temple, to try and follow Irina's path. And I am glad that each of them tossed a couple kopeks in, so that the temple has a good fund for their "do not feed the bears" sign campaign. Sadly, the priest seemed fairly a-political, had no success in managing to visit Irina himself, and could not advise us on how to find any other friends or companions of hers. So a bit of a bust.

Later, I took the opportunity to leave contact information with Dmitri's servant (I am sure that he and I are now close enough that I can call him Dmitri). While there, I saw that on top of a not-unpleasant appearance, great wit and wisdom, the Rytzar also displays sound

fiscal management of a certainly not-inconsiderable inheritance. I am reminded of what Baba Lukyana says, that the blood of the Khan-Queens of old flows through the veins of all Ice witches -- and so surely I am not beneath the notice of a Rytzar. But of still more interest, is that one of his cars had a little ding in the front -- brand new, and as yet unrepaired (on a car kept in otherwise spotless condition). Based on the information from Sophia, Dmitri certainly seems a man we can trust to work with us on our aims to protect Kislev from hag-witchery! I look forward to spending more time with him.

Determining that we would want to find where Baba Radya's apartments are in the Bokha Palace, and that asking around would be too suspicious, we decided that the mission would be less compromised by sneakiest of us (Sophia) going back to the Albionian ambassador's residence, and putting the question to her. It turns out that Radya's apartments are very likely in the red-domed tower of Bokha Palace -- though we haven't pinpointed a room yet.

I think that Henr-- Reinhold is planning to find us short interim employment. Which is a good idea. I hope that he gets us business cards. Also, soon I will have to contact Dmitri again, and it would be good to have some spending cash first.

I am just getting ready now for a solo foray into the freezing cold waters of the Kislev sewer tunnels (yuck), to see if there is any route that at least one of our number could take to get past the outer wall of the Bokha. If so, we may have more options for means to get others in our group past the wall. Thank goodness I will have the Widow's magics to protect me, so I will only need baths, rather than becoming a corpse that is beyond caring about the smell. I purchased some rags to wear, and will be on my way into the sewer, shortly.

An Ice Maiden must walk the frozen path of destiny alone, weeping for Kislev just as the Widow mourns. I just always pictured that lonely walk occurring over the Oblast, in a blizzard -- not in a sewer under the palaces.

Until next time, by which point I will be carefully bathed and perfumed.

Sessions #13–14: A Sucker for a Pretty Face

Yelenalka's Diary [from Session 13]

From Arkamine, 3014
Erengard

Dear diary,

As mentioned before, Reinhold sought some interim employment for us, to help cover day-to-day expenses until the account with Albion can be closed. The diplomatic staff from Marienburg offered a small side-job, looking out for one of the Marienberg

merchants -- Wessel Scheldt. Wessel's operations had moved to Erengard during the occupation. We were afforded train tickets, and made our way to Erengard.

We were met by Scheldt's man, Leo Gerber. We learnt that a night-time guard, Claes Smits, had been mutilated -- face scarred in strange ways, and three limbs missing. We spoke with the guard who found Smits's body, Seimon Zagers. Zagers found the body with three limbs missing, and strange pockmarks all over his skin.

Inexpensive rooms were secured, and I lay down for a while. But Sophia and Robert set up to keep watch from a rooftop. Robert claimed to have seen two people walking along, one of whom was a short human with a red scarf; then there were signs of a sudden attack by the short man against the taller man, and the taller man lost a limb; then, what appeared from the distance to be a sheet of sea foam rose out of the sea and covered the body. Sophia carried suspicious equipment (a rifle that Robert had been using) away from the scene, and Robert went to investigate and call for help.

Robert spent some time describing what he saw to the local police. He also gathered that some working girl had reported a similar attack. This became Robert's pretext for trying to find the local prostitutes. Once a Bretonnian, always a Bretonnian.

Later investigations of the first body (Smits) at the Temple of Morr suggested to Reinhold and Djon that the pockmarks were tiny bites or claw marks. It begins to sound like the short man is a mutant with a claw, and the ability to coordinate a swarm of small crabs to attack his victims. If we're right, this suggests both the weapon (mutant powers) and the motive (mutant mental problems).

Up in the early morning myself, at around the time of the fourth bell, I went on a walk to see what I could find. I was hoping for some sign of a witness. I purchased several papers, from the last few editions, and looked through them.

I saw nothing new in the police blotter, but after having heard Robert's story several times I couldn't help but notice a general story. It was about a series of high-class robberies in the good parts of town, by a crook named "the Red Scarf." The red scarf always left a red piece of yarn as a calling card, and the last robbery reported was over a month ago (possibly because of the inclement weather -- as icy escape routes are no good for a second story man).

I showed Djon the articles (whose Kislevarin is quite good -- his accent is mostly convincing though somehow his intonation is close enough the comic legend Leonerd Povich Utysov, that it makes me laugh a little), and got him to translate for Robert so that Djon could practice more. I also related the comic tale of Count Vorobyeninov, who having learnt that thieves had been stealing jewels from him, commissioned a jewel to be made from warpstone and gilded -- so as to get vengeance on the thief (who apparently became an amorphous blob of mouths and scales).

Not coming up with anything better, Robert, Reinhold and I purchased some gauzy colored fabric for our flashlights (so that they could have a recognizable signal from a distance), and are considering setting a trap for lobster-claw-thief-man. But I am concerned as it is getting late and neither Sophia nor Djon have returned.

Have they been cornered by the beast? In their investigations, did they fail to pay the right bribes and wind up in custody? I wonder if Djon is out looking for a homecoming present for me, to thank me for showing him Kislev and helping him with the language? That would explain why he needs Sophia! I'm so excited, I wonder if I can keep from looking through Djon's bags to see what he got me!

I will continue relating our hunt for the short-gentleman-burglar-turned-mutant-serial-killer soon. Oh, and I should also buy an eagle feather.

Yelenalka's Diary [from Session 14]

From Arkamine, 3014
Erengard

Dear diary,

So much has happened!

Robert, Reinhold and I staked out the docks again, hoping to find the mutant. We became separated from Reinhold. We could see Reinhold speaking with a couple policemen, and he left in their company -- obviously he was distracting the police away from where Robert and I were watching with guns, so we could avoid suspicion. Clearly we were expected to continue the mission, so we did.

Eventually Robert and I each heard the sounds of something creeping up on us! I threw a bag over its head, and Robert began to club it with the butt end of his pistol -- when we heard the sounds of Djon meekly calling out from the bag. We removed the bag, dusted him off, and asked him to never again sneak up on us like that. I suspect that he will comply.

That night turned out to be a bust, so we went back to the rooms and slept. Late morning, after too-little sleep, we got some brunch, got the newspapers, and heard the gossip. Apparently the red scarf struck again! A jewelry store had been burgled, and the famous calling card left behind. Of course we had to examine the scene of the crime. Robert and I went, and got some information about the missing jewelry. I recognized the unique way in which the red yarn was tied, but could not place it -- though I realize now that the resemblance to Sophia's own unique way of tying her boot laces was wholly coincidental. We checked out some nearby pawn shops, but we don't have cause to think that the one piece similar to the description had only come into the shop that day.

Walking through the neighborhood, we saw a very strange sight. An attic window left wide open, in the dead of Kislevarin winter. A somewhat bent drain-pipe suggested movement to and fro the window via the rooftop and the drain, in the right section of town, suggested that it could be used as a hideout for the red scarf. Robert felt a twitching in his toes, which is usually a suggestion that there could be something important.

So, we marched up to the front door and knocked. In case there was a confrontation with the red scarf, I did not want the owner of the house -- an elderly woman -- to be put in any danger. So I silently asked the Widow to help me put on my best imperious Lukyana-like voice, and told the woman that we were concerned about her open window and simply marched past her. She was more than a little shocked, and ran next door -- probably to seek help, so we moved quickly. Djon, Robert and I proceeded straight to the attic, where indeed we found a haul of small inexpensive goods that had been reported stolen by the red yarn thief. And also a suspicion-raising statue of a crab. Djon quickly started dumping the evidence into his bag -- taking care not to touch the crab statue (we both laughed some more about the comic story of Count Vorobyaninov). The room appeared to have been vacant for at least a couple weeks -- probably around the time that the red scarf had become a mutant.

Then, hearing noise from the street -- probably the older woman come back with burly neighbors -- we had to figure out how to make our exit. There were two windows in the attic. I exited the window on the busier side, because I expected to be able to escape quicker and hoped to act as a distraction -- I asked the Widow to ease my way -- she made the air under my feet solid, like cobblestones, so I could walk along the rooftops to an alley a little ways away -- lots of people on that busy front street started pointing at me and gasping. Meanwhile Djon and Robert used the distraction to get themselves to the ground on the other side. We each met back at our rooms (and I changed my hairstyle and clothing, so as not to be recognized as the "floating woman" should we have to return to the neighborhood). Yes, diary, it is the first time that the Widow had so elevated me -- and despite my deep concern that I may be shot out of the air, I found it quite exhilarating!

Sophia had never returned to the inn from her shopping trip with Djon. We considered it likely that she had gone AWOL again. Or, alternately, was under secret orders from Reinhold. But because Reinhold was still with the police, we couldn't ask him.

We examined the goods in the bag. A slip of paper had a single name written on it -- "Caddiz." Asking about in the area of the docks, people quickly recognized the name. Caddiz is the name of a grounded and abandoned ship just northwest of the docks. Deciding that we had just enough daylight left to get there, Robert, Djon and I rented a rowboat.

By the way, dear diary, Djon is stronger than I imagined -- he remains not unpleasant to look at, even though he does remain something of a cad (I think that he tried to look up my skirts when I was exiting the attic). At least he has abandoned thievery and larceny --

a sure sign that he can be reformed, which is exactly what one looks for in a man. Sadly, I am still in mourning . . .

We approached the vessel in the twilight and slowed, considering what to do next. Then Robert and I distinctly heard the sound of a splash, as something diving. Not wanting to race the mutant back to the docks, because it would win and surely take another victim, we decided to draw attention. We probably should have shouted and called so that it would attack us directly -- but I was concerned that the mutant would have too great an advantage of us in the water (being clearly amphibious, and able to summon swarms of crabs).

Instead, I called upon the Widow, imploring her to freeze the surface of the water, near where the mutant swam. This worked a little too well -- the Widow was chastising me for being too forward. The ice magic where I stood was very strong, and the glacial surge created a terrible problem -- a localized hail-storm was centered on us, hurling rock-sized stones at us. We couldn't see anything, and were being damaged -- Robert was nearly killed by a couple big ones right on his noggin. This also cost us about half the deposit on the boat, but such is the cost of war. The Widow was surely right to chastise me, and she did so quite effectively by having my reckless calls bring Robert so close to death.

Djon rowed us out of the storm, to the shore, from which we started making noise hoping to attract the mutant. But it was too late -- the mutant was clearly on its way back to the docks. Fortunately, we could see the ripples from the movements of the mutant, still frozen in the ice! Even as she punishes, the Widow shows the way. Robert showed off his mastery of geometry, and calculated where on the wharf the crab-thing would surface. We -- well, Djon mostly -- rowed quickly back. We were just in time to see a terrible attack on a vagrant. Robert took a couple pot-shots, hoping to scare the lobster thing off - - but the mutant was unstoppable and did as its evil kind is prone to do.

By the time we closed, the mutant was still eating -- and would not be distracted from it. It was not distracted by the shots. We clambered onto the dock, as the mutant-thing called out to its dark god -- and a huge crab, five yards across, rose from the sea, damaging our boat still more -- I could picture my deposit just slipping away. Robert was even more affected than I by the loss of our deposit, as he turned to flee from the huge crab. On my acting as a conduit, the Widow brought a hailstorm down upon the mutant (that glacial surge earlier did at least show me something).

We could not directly see what transpired in the hailstorm. Djon and I were alternately caught in its claws, and on my request the Widow several times caused the crab to lose its grip, so we could get away. The terrible crab sent visions of its unholy symbol into my head -- the statue we had back in the room. Djon apparently also saw this. The creature was clearly showing its desire for the item. Of course neither of us would ever return such an item into the hands of a chaos creature. Djon could not be convinced to leave it alone, so I backed to the edge of the hailstorm -- in which I saw the now-decapitated mutant; which made me call more forcefully to Djon that he should not allow the crab to come near him.

Knowing the risk involved, but seeing life on the line, I asked the Widow to save Djon (not the wisest thing to ask a law elemental who doesn't want me looking at boys) -- and she responded to the ancient compact with the Khan Queens to entangle the beast in icy tentacles. I for one was impressed, and it caused the chaos crab to back away from Djon. Meanwhile I tried to drag the mutant body out of the localized hail storm. As I left, swarms of small crabs began to come up from the sea -- the Widow created a couple walls of ice to delay the swarms, while Djon continued to drag the mutant body away.

Eventually we got away, and called on citizens to bring the police to us. We explained the whole story to the police -- except for the parts involving the red scarf's attic, or the statuette (we were not thrilled at the idea that Chekists or the mayor of Erengard might get access to such an item). Eventually they furnished a report, and agreed to let our former employer inspect the body. While we were in the police station, giving our statements, we passed both Reinhold and Sophia in cells -- we did our best to avoid eye-contact, and neither of them drew any attention to us.

Djon, Robert and I got paid. Djon is also planning on trying to find an allied government that wishes to purchase the statue, once we are back in Kislev city. We don't really see any need to go out of our way to let Reinhold know we got paid, since he left us to fight giant mutants and crab monsters on our own. Typical officer -- "you doughboys and girls can go over the top, I will sit back in my cozy office six miles from the line."

In order to get the crab statue back without being checked on the train, I packed it into a crate and posted it for our Inn in Kislev city. I am writing this now from the Erengard-Kislev train.

At least now I've had a few days to get cleaned up from my sewer adventure (yuck), and have some extra spending cash. I am looking forward to finding Rytzar Dmitri Yakushkin, for he is certainly a capable and well-connected young man, who will be an invaluable asset in freeing the Tzar from Radya's influence.

I should take Sophia shopping, as she is wonderful at finding real treasures on sale -- it might make a better impression if I call on Dmitri again in something more presentable than my uniform. I suppose that I should also ask her what she was arrested for -- but I am not totally certain that I want to hear the answer.

[Written in Arcane Language: Magic, hidden away] [from session 15]

From Arkamine, 3014
Kislev City

Dear diary,

Things have been hectic. We no sooner arrived back from our Erengard mission than we started seeking allies in our main mission.

I may not have mentioned it before, but a big part of Reinhold's rationale for us taking the side job was so as to accumulate funds to bribe Nylund, the vicious Norscan bastard, to smuggle us into the Bokha Palace at the time of their command performance. Of course we don't really need Nylund; all we need is the good will of Emina and Anton, which we have. But I certainly had no objection to a side money-making mission, as that is frankly part of the point of being mercenaries, and it got me the capital to be able to get something decent to wear.

Before going to meet Dmitri, I took Kargun clothes shopping. You wouldn't think it to look at his gruff exterior, but he has an Estellian sense of fashion. I will never go clothes shopping again without him! He found a piece of such exquisite quality in the back of a discount rack -- well, that's one dwarf who knows how to dig for gold! Of course I bought the dress, and put it to use.

Dressed up, with the other Stockboys in tow, I called on Rytzar Dmitri Yakushkin. He was very guarded, but I tried to put it to him bluntly so as to avoid hemming and hawing; we knew that his car was involved in the attempt on Radya, and we had the means and ability to finish the job. Dmitri remained effusive, but clarified that he would see if he could find a way to get us into the palace. I briefly started to have my doubts about him, when he said a couple things which suggested he was not loyal to the Tzar -- but I realized later that he was likely testing me to make sure that I was working to protect the Tzar from Radya rather than acting as an anti-government anarchist. Was Djon a little jealous of Dmitri??? That must mean that Djon thinks that Dmitri has noticed me!

Then, we went to the circus to seek assistance from Anton and Emina. Anton Ramadani is a perfect gentleman. Very thoughtful, and so compassionate that he stands by his sister Emina to protect her from the ravages of Chaos that are slowly turning her into a monster. While faithful, generous Anton shows such courage, I am sure that Emina is safe. He is a perfect combination of humble and gregarious, and both refined in intellect and unafraid of hard work. He began to look for ways by which they could get us into the palace without paying Nylund's wages.

During our visit, there was a shocking occurrence; Nylund was killed in his office (some circumstantial evidence suggests a large thuggish Kislevarin from the army barracks). There is no loss to the world, and the wages of crime and chaos are high, so it is no surprise that he died as he lived. But it was somewhat disturbing, as there was some talk that the show might not go on after all! Fortunately Barik (the formerly "Blue" dwarf, who is now head of the circus, and certainly far more pleasant and personable than any Norscan) quickly decided that the circus still had the means to do the show and would have to anyway to pay bills on time. Barik learned of Kargun's capacity as a private eye, and got some tips from Kargun.

Later, as a unit, we began discussing what we know about our possible assets vis-à-vis Radya. I started to compile a list of people:

Pavel Andreyev -- a dwarfish doctor who has theories about how to cure Vassily, but who has no access because of Radya

Anton -- Emina's brother, who shows his kind and gentle disposition by standing by his sister and protecting her from both violence and from the effects of her ailment; also a fit and capable acrobat and athlete

Barik -- the new head of the circus since Nylund's death

Rytsar Dmitri Yakushkin -- his car was involved in an attempt on Radya's life, he has spoken forcefully against her, and he is a perfect gentleman

Emina -- our primary circus contact, but a mutant

Tzarina Ilsa Rebikov -- because Radya has been pretending to treat Vassily the Tzarina has been supportive of her

Irina -- In jail for her own radical politics, would almost certainly like to see Baba Radya gone

Lars Nylund -- Dead. Why? Who was the mysterious person who appeared to have been responsible for Lars' death? Not our problem, but maybe whoever did it could be our problem or an asset?

MD -- let us pretend that she doesn't exist, shall we?

Baroness Natalia Aisenyev -- a noblewoman who has cause to dislike Radya as she has been displaced as a favorite of the Tzarina, and who has helped arrange the circus's command performance at the Bokha Palace

Radya -- the villain of the piece, is uncouth and hard to find for someone who is supposedly frequently carousing

Tzar Nikolai Rebikov -- Is far away, but because Radya has been pretending to treat Vassily he has been supportive of her

Rudiger -- Anton's mentor, but not around now, Rudiger is a fire mage who has supposedly managed to cure mutation at least once

Tatyana -- has been following Radya around, and is apparently not friendly with her; she is probably a Chekist

Tzarevich Vassily Rebikov -- the child is suffering at Radya's hands, though he may believe the lies that she is helping him

In any case, I have presented a new proposal to Lieutenant Kriegspiel, which would hopefully keep us from making life more difficult for Anton, would allow us the freedom to act without professional guards and palace defenses, and would otherwise make our mission possible. I await the Lieutenant's comments, but my basic idea is that Djon disguise himself as a low-level officer delivering a letter to Radya from the Tzar's secretary, telling Radya that the Tzar needs to meet with her secretly, and that the Tzar expects her to come incognito. And then we head off the train ourselves.

We'll be in touch, dear Diary

Yelenka's Diary [from Session 16]

Arkamine 36th, 3014
The City of Nagenhof

Dear diary,

Though I wrote only a couple days ago, it seems like ages! It is because I have been extremely busy.

Lieutenant Kriegspiel, after careful consideration, accepted my proposal for a plan to finish our mission, and authorized me to begin putting it into effect. He is watching very closely, making sure that I make no errors. I am sure that if this plan succeeds, he will reward me by recommending me to the rank of corporal, so I have to make this right!

In a nutshell, the plan is to lure the target out. By getting her to travel to the far outskirts, we could lie in wait for her at a place of our choosing, rather than being trapped without an exit strategy in the Bokha Palace.

We had to pick the right place and time to spring the trap. Which meant, among other things, finding train schedules. We had to get uniforms and insignia of low-ranking Kislevite officers. We had to get intelligence about the activities of particular units along the front. We had to learn the name of a Reikish diplomat who could be on a Kislevite mission. We had to find the name and writing samples of an agent close to the Tsar. And we had to find a professional forger.

The Lieutenant gave me the name of a Reikish diplomat we could use, and found a handwriting sample from Aleksandr Aseff (the Tsar's secretary) extending an invitation to the opera *Girl in the Glass*. Kargun found a perfect uniform for me and Djon found one for himself. The Lieutenant and Sophia found one set of lieutenant's insignia, at a pawn shop. I found another, at an estate sale. By going out to "Raskolnikov's" again, I got a lead on a scribe who asks few questions -- one Tyurin who works out of a stationery

shop called “The Write Stuff” -- Sophia and I negotiated a deal with Tyurin (the prices were cut a little, in return for letting him keep the handwriting sample).

Djon, after taking just enough time to find a uniform for himself, skipped out. We proceeded without him, but as the afternoon wore on, it became clear that he was not paying proper attention to his duties! He and I would have to drill and memorize our names and roles and prepare for a crucial delivery. And since my mission hung in the balance, I was not going to let him mess it up! Sophia and I tracked him down; weak-minded fool as he is, he was lurching with Tatiana, certainly saying too much and compromising our mission. We extracted him.

Djon and I practiced our roles. We dressed in our uniforms and headed out. It didn't take long for me to realize that Tatiana was following us. It wouldn't do any good to back down now, so we proceed with the mission -- our best hope is that the chekist tart spends too long puzzling out what we're doing to figure out our plans, and to get out of Kislev city!

Djon and I reported to the guards at the Bokha Palace. We made it clear that we should give our letter to Baba Radya herself, but we were of course relieved when a servant in Radya's quarters was asked to deliver the note. We insisted on a receipt (partly to secure the delivery of the letter, partly to play the part of conscientious young lieutenants). We got out of there, and returned to the room.

The letter we left in the servant's care read as follows:

To the revered Baba Radya, Counselor to the Tsar Rebikov,

His Imperial Majesty, Tsar Rebikov, commands your presence in the Gryphon's Wood. You will meet with His Imperial Majesty briefly, and soon after will join him in council with His Excellency, Ambassador Gregor Schultheiss, Ambassador in service of the Reikish Confederation.

A carriage will be waiting for you at Gate 3, Nagenhof Station, on Arkamine the 38th at 6:00 AM. The driver will be expecting you under the name Elena Makarov, whom he understands to be a banker from Erengrad.

Your servant,

Aleksandr Aseff
Secretary to His Imperial Majesty, Tsar of all the Oblast, Nikolai Rebikov

We all agreed that we wanted to get out of Kislev city before Tatiana chose to ask more questions. And having some advance time in Nagenhof wouldn't hurt. With some well-placed bribes so that the guards wouldn't search the bags too closely, we got on the train. And here we are!

We're going to get the lay of the land tomorrow, and work out the details of our plan.

I hope to write to you again, soon.

Yelenalka's Diary [from Session 17]

Arkamine 38th, 3014
On the Oblast

Dear Diary,

In this whole war, I have not encountered anything as terrifying or alienating as what transpired today. This must be what Lukyana meant, when she said that travelling with mercenaries would make me into a "real" ice witch.

I didn't understand before how working in a unit would help when, as Lukyana always said, "an Ice Maiden walks alone." Now I think I have a glimpse. Today's work showed me why I should walk alone. Lukyana must have wanted me to see the worst face of people who I thought I could trust -- and one will never see that clearer than in war.

As one expects with any plan, there were interesting challenges. Without going on too long about it, there were two cars stolen from civilians -- a war crime, but one of such minor importance in the great scheme of things that I was cajoled into overlooking it. Sophia and I waited at an ambush spot, and toppled a tree. Meanwhile, the boys stole another car and picked up the person who they took to be Baba Radya at the train station.

At the ambush point, the chaos of war ensued. Reinhold went to the back (under the cover of looking for tools to get the tree out of the way) and set off Kargun's bomb. There was great confusion, as it became clear to Djon that a taxi -- which had been following the boys' car -- was speeding away, while there was no sign of Radya in the boys' car. Sophia ran for her motorcycle and began pursuit against the taxi, with Reinhold in her sidecar. I followed in the "getaway" car, and then moved over so Djon could drive.

The pursuit was exciting, but essentially over when Reinhold shot out a tire on the taxi. I called in the name of Shoika, to bring the ice to hold the car -- because we knew not what resistance we would encounter. A shade of some sort appeared (certainly summoned by Radya) which attempted to do combat with us. A woman in the car and a taxi driver attempted to get out; both of them removed themselves from the car and begged mercy (I helped the woman out of the ice trap).

The terrifying shade and nearby lights panicked the group. I begged my fellow soldiers to hold the two in the back of the car, so we could get away and interrogate her at leisure to confirm whether or not the woman was Baba Radya, and to be able to move the taxi driver far enough from our route that he could not endanger our escape from Kislev.

There remains the possibility that she is not Baba Radya, and that Baba Radya took the form of a bird or spirit and made off by herself. The odds are good that the woman was Baba Radya, but there is no chance that the taxi driver was Baba Radya, and I said as much. But Sophia, despite her claims to being a civilian baker by nature, wanted blood, and our spineless commander let her commit the most heinous war-crime -- the cold-blooded execution of both. I can even justify killing the woman, because she might have been Baba Radya and with those lights bearing down there was some panic to make our escape -- but the killing of the taxi driver "so there would be no witnesses" was a war crime of the worst sort.

I was already under the effect of the spell "winter walk," which allowed me to proceed apace into the oblast unencumbered by snow. After a half mile, I made a little camp in this copse, and am writing to you, dear diary. I don't want to be so alone, but I can't just go back there, when both officers over me have behaved so monstrously.

I wish I could talk to Djon -- he'd know what to do. Why does my mind turn to Djon, rather than Anton? I suppose it's because Djon knows the Corporal and the Lieutenant, and understands our military oaths and code, and what it is to be a soldier. I keep remembering that he promised to hike with me for our getaway -- to protect me from wolves -- so I know, or hope, that he does care.

Right now, my plan is to hike to the train and ride to Praag. From there, I may go home and seek Baba Lukyana's counsel. But I really know what I have to do. I should travel back to Tilea, and report to the heads of the organization that the officers committed war-crimes against civilians in an allied nation -- and also report myself for having gone AWOL after seeing this lapse in leadership, placing myself at their mercy to receive punishment.

I wonder if the woman was Baba Radya? I hope so -- for the sake of my nation, my Tzar, and my conscience, for I was willing to see her put down like a dog.

I am feeling a mighty deep chill, so will finish setting up my camp and try to get some rest.

[Post session 17]

Djon was concerned for Yelena and received permission from Reinhold to take a leave of two weeks and two days to find her, with the plan being to meet up with the others at a hotel in the town of Schonsze, just east of Erengard.

And so, with Sophia as their sole translator, Reinhold, Robert, Sabin, and Kargun carefully make their way to Schonsze, trying to maintain a low profile as only a dwarf, a dwelf, a halfling, a Bretonnian, and an Imperial traveling together in Kislev can do. During the couple weeks' time, it appears that the mission was indeed a success, as Baba Radya is apparently missing from the capital and the tzarevitch's health is declining

rapidly. Yay? What's more, although there are reports of the brutal murder of a cab driver and his fare near Nagenhof, there are no descriptions of any of you as being associated with the crime in the papers.

Djon's deadline is just about up when a telegram arrives at the hotel for Reinhold. Djon has been uncontrollably delayed, and so he will instead return directly to Tilea.

On the plus side, the bad feeling that Robert had about traveling on to Erengrad to make good your escape from Kislev has passed. And so, with the funds earned from Robert, Sabin, and Kargun's side job, you book passage on a ship and return to the headquarters of the Brotherhood of Saint Ranald. There you are introduced to two new members of your unit: 2nd Lt. Jersey Smith played by Scott Gray and a still-to-be-determined character played by Scott Lutz.

TO: KARGUN B, CO SCHONZE ARMS
FROM: YR, PRAAG

BL IS ANGRY YOU ARE NOT HERE STOP
BL IS EVEN MORE ANGRY THAT DR IS HERE STOP
GRANDMA TOLD US TO GO NORTH STOP
WE COULD NOT REFUSE HER STOP
I WILL GET DR TO TILEA SOON STOP

To: YR, PRAAG
From: Kargun B

Travel safely STOP
I will be very angry with DR if you do not return safely STOP
There will be serious consequences for DR if you are harmed STOP
I expect to see you soon STOP

Session #18: Groznograd

Yelenalka's Diary [from Session 18]

The end of Arkamine, 3014
On the Oblast

Dear Diary,

I apologize that I have written so little. With the cold, and the struggle to keep Djon alive, it is hard to write. It's hard to say whether it is because the days pass slowly, or because the days pass quickly, but time in the far north is not like time in the city!

Djon found me at the train station. We agreed to travel north together to Praag, as this is a crossroads from which I could visit my family and from which he could return to Erengard. We were intercepted by Baba Lukyana, who is getting rusty -- she was acting like Djon is some threat to my oaths. Really, it's more than a little embarrassing for me to try and explain to Lukyana that there is no chance at all of what she was suggesting.

After dancing around the question of why Kargun was not there, Lukyana ordered me to take over some of her duties patrolling the far north. Things have become difficult for her, since some recent political developments. Djon, dear that he is, insisted on coming with me in order to "protect [me] from wolves." Well, Djon was good as his word, and did, indeed, protect me from wolves. But that is part of a long tale which I will spare you, dear diary, involving villagers and poison.

We managed to supply ourselves well, and are continuing our patrol of the Oblast by dog sled.

World events:

The next session will pick up a few months after you left Kislev. The majority of the Stockboys reported in to headquarters. Djon and Yelena will presumably be along shortly afterward, but with the war, communications have been spotty, and you've heard nothing further since Schonsze.

Meanwhile, here are some of the major events happening in the world over the past several months:

Whereas before you just needed to worry about mines and Imperial ships (and sea monsters, and Norscan raiders, and ...), the Empire has now started using submersibles to attack the shipping lanes. You were lucky to have managed to find passage on a cargo ship heading out from Erengard when you did, as many ships are waiting weeks at a time to join large convoys escorted by military ships. And others are simply remaining in port, with the risk to travel not being considered worth the potential rewards.

With news of his son's worsening health following Baba Radya's disappearance, the tzar returned to the capital. Pavel Andreyev was appointed the boy's new physician; however, the tzarevitch's condition continued to worsen. But then after several weeks, the tzarevitch, seeming on the verge of death, made a remarkable turnaround. Vassily's recovery was marked by a day of celebration across Kislev.

The Badlands allowed Imperial forces safe passage through their lands to attack Kislev's southern border. In response, the tzar declared war upon the Badlands. Bretonnia has its hands full and so is unable to spare forces to assist, but Albion and Tilea both join in the war against the Badlands. The general scuttlebutt is that Tilea (which has also now come

I've been exploring the local sites with a young fellow, Harry Timson, who joined up from Orklahansis. This outfit is taking in a lot of Naggarthians. Anyhow Harry and I are in a contest over who has more to go back to, which I am winning of course all because of you. But he's got a sweetheart too, who maybe you'd like to look up, named Sherri Bline, in Ashedown. And he's left behind his business building trucks -- he said that with so much Naggarth steel heading out to the Old World, he could hardly keep the doors of his shop open, and decided that if the business was going to be on hiatus he "may as well help these decadent [REDACTED] patch things back together."

Most of the locals are real nice and welcoming. These folk'll try to give you their last slice of cake, made with their last rationed egg and butter, because they are so grateful. This is Sigmar's work, and it's nice to be recognized.

As soon as I can, I will get you an address closer to where we are stationed. For now, any letter to me should be sent via Ranald's outpost in Tilea. It'll take a while to get to me, but boy will any word from you be welcome!

I'm thinking about you at home, playing tennis and enjoying your club. And missing you terribly. I'll write within the week. I am most sincerely missing you,

Your Jersey

Session #19: The Block

Selected Letters from Jersey Smith [from session 19]

Plough-Tide, 3015
From Guisoreux, Brettonia

Dear Beth,

Well, I don't think I've got to worry about the censors in this letter! Our exploits are about to be told in the papers. If you haven't read about it yet, look for it! There's no reason for anyone to care if I tell you that we're in Guisoreux for a few days, if I tell you about the mission we just completed, if I tell you about my buddy Reinhold, or if I told you about [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]!

Anyhow, it was great seeing Reinhold again. He's still a bachelor, but eventually he'll have to settle down. He continues to like to hear options from those around him.

We had a small team: Reinhold, myself, a Mootish sharpshooter named Sophia, and a [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] named A [REDACTED]. Well, thank Sigmar that A [REDACTED] is a [REDACTED] -- because it was key to our cover story, but more on that!

Our mission was to break into a big Marienburg prison-island called the Block, get past the occupying Reiklanders and free Deirdre Owens. I'm sure you've been reading all about Miss Owens; she's the nurse with the Red Hammer that helped Allied prisoners of war to escape, and who the Reik was planning to execute.

After the boat left us off, planning to pick us up four and a half hours later, we made our way across the field -- watching the timing of the lights, carefully. The wall would have been impossible without Reinhold, who climbed up and cut the razor-wire -- after that we could hitch a rope and clamber over.

Well, there was lots of sneaking. And I was reminded that gunpowder doesn't taste too good (I needed something sticky to hold some glass to cloth -- so I could break the window without as much noise). We crept through several cell-blocks without being detected. The [REDACTED] had a pet ferret with her, which distracted the guard after some noise had been made by our group, and made the guard think that there were rats. At another point, A [REDACTED] made a terrible ruckus, and we could see the guards' flashlight coming closer -- so I threw a fork across the cellblock, to clatter in a cage and make the guard think it was one of the cellmates.

Some of the prisoners woke up and saw us, for certain. That's why we were in Reikish uniforms -- so they wouldn't call attention to us.

Anyhow, eventually we got to Miss Owens's cell. Reinhold and I carefully pried up the hinge pins and opened the door. A [REDACTED] and Sophia were watching the way and were confronted by a guard. They managed to take the guard out with a [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and chloroform. We wrapped him up like a present, put him under the covers, and sealed him back in Miss Owens's cell.

As we were leaving, we encountered a very suspicious guard. We think he was probably on to us -- maybe he saw some sign of our entry (like the missing window pane). But he also knew he was outnumbered, so was afraid to raise an alarm, and tried to coax us into walking with him back to the "office" (probably a barracks). Well, when I was afraid of us being found out, I nodded to Reinhold, lassoed the guard, and Reinhold grabbed his gun away. It didn't take long for us to get him bound and gagged under the effects of another [REDACTED] [REDACTED], and stashed away.

Then we simply went over the wall, the same way we came in, and waited in the woods until our pick-up boat arrived.

I'm thinking about you all the time. With lots of Marienburg refugees here, I'm hoping to find some word about your nanna. I keep on missing you,

Your Jersey

Sessions #20, 22–23: The Monuments Mercs

Selected Letters from Jersey Smith [from session 20]

Sigmarzeit, 3015

Written in Marienburg (posted later)

Dear Beth,

Right as rain, the business with Miss Owens got us another plum assignment! We had a special meeting with a businessman in Albion, who was a Marienburg national, named ██████████ ██████████ ██████████. He left some precious artwork behind in his country estate, and hired us to liberate it from the Hun. The most significant piece he hoped to rescue being the statue, Veneducci's *Shallya*, which he'd left hidden in an old priest-hole in the house, but he's also interested in recovering Lessart's *The Death of Verrat*, Meissner's *Boy with Flute*, and Salierathiel's *Seascape at Night*. Of course, the statue weights a dozen or two stone, but we'd have to solve that problem later.

In addition to the same team that rescued Miss Owens, we had a . . . dwarfish? elfish? physician with us. Sabin is a chemist who sometimes works with the group. It seemed an odd choice for a team, but I guess that the boys in Milagrano know what they are doing, because Sabin's chemistry may just have given us the edge we need!

Talking to Miss Deirdre Owens, she got us in touch with a smuggler who knows ways in and out of occupied Marienburg. He suggested that we follow the ██████████ road ██████████ from ██████████, passing through ██████████, ██████████ and ██████████. So, sure enough, that's how we travelled.

Marienburg is a mite bit bigger than I would have thought! I've dropped your Nana's name with a couple merchants, but they got nothing. I suppose she's probably on the other side of the country. But rest assured, I'm still looking!

While still in occupied Bretonnia, we encountered a patrol. Sophia and I left the wagon to watch from the woods, with our rifles trained in case it came to a fight. But Kriegspiel made them think he was just a poacher (smart of him to throw the Reikish off, by suggesting the small and self-serving offense of poaching). They took his rifle, and let the wagon go!

Anyhow, we went by wagon to the village of H██████████. ██████████ ██████████ ██████████'s house had been commandeered by Reiklanders, as a fort of hospice for men off duty. It's the biggest house in town, so it isn't real surprising. But it posed a problem for us. We had to figure how to empty the place out a bit.

We hid the wagon in the woods, and explored the town a bit. There's a nice little tavern still doing business despite the occupation.

After some reconnaissance we had a right bit of debate about how to handle the situation. Sophia, I think, has a bit of an elevated opinion of the ability of the five of us to conduct a battle of attrition, suggesting that we simply go in guns blazing against the sixty or so Imperials. Reinhold is good ol' Reinhold, and calling on the stories from the Reikish past of how the Sylvanian hero Deneb Luftang saved the Reik from itself, continues to believe that fire is always the answer; though he grudgingly accepted that when we are trying to save artwork it may not be the answer. I am quite impressed with the ██████ Adrienne, who came up with a very clever and bold plan -- having her approach as a travelling initiate of Shallya -- able to pull off the disguise because of her ability to, as a ██████ ██████, ██████ ██████ ██████ -- but it seemed a lot of danger and sacrifice to ask a soldier with such potent and useful skills to risk herself, and besides Adrienne's pet ██████ became sick (I wish it hadn't gotten into my bubble gum) so she ended up tending to little fuzball.

Well, shooting the breeze with the doctor, he mentioned that he could make a big ol vat of stink from a combination of musk and some mean-ol-acid called "Cadaverinne" what he had in his kit. Anyhow, that became the heart of our plan. Doctor Sabin went down to the town innocent as could be, and stopped at the fertilizer store to buy a spritzer like we use to spray crops. Attaching a length of tube from his own kit, he had a delivery device.

So I went at darkest night to start driving folk out of the house. First night, I clambered up and found a spot that I took to be between the 2nd-floor ceiling and 3rd-floor floor where we'd be trying to extract the statue, drilled a hole, and sprayed a whole lotta that stuff in. Then ran! It reminded me of Reinhold and me during rush week at officer training camp, when we got blue team going by . . . well, I'll tell that story later. The others watched and covered, signalling when danger was near, helpin' me to extract myself.

It looked like things were going well with operation stinko, from a few of the folk from the house movin' to the tavern (I didn't visit -- too busy scrubbing myself). So the Lieutenant said, "Let's make em think something is wrong with the whole house!" And the next night I did much the same, but using the chimney to run the hose I dropped it right into the kitchens and the two floors above! I had to run fast because there was already some late-night cooking going on in the kitchens.

Again, the next day, I didn't go to the tavern cuz I was busy washing. But I am told something strange . . . The house is filled with soldiers from all over the Reik. But only Mootlanders moved out. The stink was bad enough to affect anyone. So what's going on? Do only the Mootlanders (the Kaiser's people) get enough disposable pay to be able to afford new digs on days off? Or are the soldiers not from the Reik all housed in the out-buildings? I don't know!

The Mootlanders all work for Col. Riefenstahl . . . an Imperial name I should remember. From the Border Wars, maybe? And the halflings have an insignia unfamiliar to Reinhold, so are part of a newer unit or service.

I don't want to hide anything from you, darling. But I don't want to worry you -- I'll remind you that I have Mootish blood in me, so I expect to be safe. I'm beginning to think that this unit may have something to do with ██████████ collection -- and I'm beginning to wonder if they may be looking for ██████████ in the house. Could Veneducci have worked with ██████████ ██████████ with ██████████? It would explain why Veneducci eventually ██████████ and ██████████ ██████████.

Anyhow, I hope to pick up this tale soon. What was looking impossible just might be possible!

Looking up, and hoping that you're seeing the same moon I am,

Your Jersey

Selected Letters from Jersey Smith [from session 22]

Sigmarzeit, 3015

Written in Halsdorpf (posted later or never, secreted on Jersey's person)

Dear Beth,

I am under a bunk in a Reikish barracks in occupied Marienburg, scrawling this note in haste while listening carefully to the commotion around.

Sophia and I did a quick reconnaissance mission inside the house last night. She entered via the kitchens, I entered via a window in the upstairs. I found and secured the statue in its hiding spot, while Sophia confirmed the dumbwaiter functioned (though it would need to be oiled or greased when we actually used it, or it would be screeching), and that the path to the hiding hole was something through which we could move.

Sophia also overheard a conversation. She learned that (possibly because of the stink gas) the Reikish were packing things up to abandon the house for inspectors and exterminator (she had already known, from her spy-work in town, that they were boxing up all of the paintings). This could be good for us or not so good -- everything would be packed up -- but everything would be packed up.

Reinhold asked the dwarf elf vampire physician to try and concoct a draught of phenobarbital in gaseous form, that could be released in the barracks to help keep the

enemy asleep. The doctor managed a couple canisters that would cover a small spread -- but we would have to manage to wheel the several-hundred pound statue out silently.

Reinhold's plan was for us to all wear gasmasks. The jury-rigged one I've got isn't very comfortable -- he ordered me to hand over my machine-made one -- which makes sense because he is the strongest of us so we don't want him drowsy when we're carting out the statue. We would enter via the kitchen in teams of two. Sabin and Sophia would grease the dumbwaiter and bring it up, then Reinhold and I would enter and climb the central stairs to the 2nd floor and follow them. We would apply the gas in a couple sensitive spots, to help keep people asleep.

Unfortunately something must have gone wrong. No sooner were we in the foyer at the bottom of the stairs than we heard some commotion coming from the floor above, and a halfling ran down the stairs. Reinhold thought fast and tackled the halfling while more noise was coming from above.

Reinhold kept trying to silence the halfling, and ran back out the kitchen door with the struggling Mootlander under his arm (his favorite tactic, you'll recall, in Snotball). I took that opportunity to go up the stairs and see what was going on. It didn't look or sound good. There were sounds of several Reikish persons starting a search and I saw signs of smoke from Sabin's smoke bomb at the end of the hall. At this point I can hope that they escaped out a window, or are at least holed up in the hiding hole with the statue.

There was an open door, which I took to be the room from which the Mootlander had escaped, so I leapt in. When I entered a halfling sat up in bed and groggily asked what was going on. I put on my best Reikish accent, and said, "Nothing, soldier, sorry to disturb you," and watched him nod off -- then I slipped under this bunk.

Since I scrawled those last words, I had to stop. A couple soldiers came in shouting about an intruder and looking. Seeing that the Mootlander in the other bed, Edmond Pennywhistle, was alive, the others left with disgust that he had slept through the excitement, and began a search for the intruder.

While they are still mostly on the first floor and grounds trying to find Reinhold, I am going to try and make it to the roof -- before they start carefully searching each room. Then I will slip down and make my way to safety, hopefully rejoining the others. This mission may have to be aborted.

I would write my will out to you, darling, but I suspect that if I don't make it out alive this letter will be buried with me in a mass grave. Instead I am writing, for my benefit and yours, that if you receive this letter it means I am still alive.

I expect to make it through this, darling, because in you I have everything to live for,

Your Jersey

Selected Letters from Jersey Smith [from session 23]

Postscripts to the letter written in Halsdorph, Sigmarzeit, 3015 from session 22
Posted from Gisoreux

P.S. So I overheard a conversation between some of the Mootlanders, while lying under the bed. They were wondering if we had found “it,” whatever “it” is. Given their insignia, depicting a wheel of chaos, it was looking clearer that these halflings were not here for rest and relaxation, but as part of some new weapon development here.

P.P.S. I made my way out, grabbing a Reikish uniform, and donning the hat and coat. It wasn't all that hard to make it to safety. When I got to the camp, Adrienne was there with Albert! Reinhold came along shortly. We worried a bit about Sabin and Sophia, and I scouted a bit, but they eventually came back before daybreak. Sophia explained that she had overheard something about a particular book they were looking for -- and that from the way they were talking, she took it to be a book of magic. We had also gathered something about the prior owner, before the occupation, having a name that didn't match the name of the man in Albion -- so we are beginning to wonder if this was a setup by him to steal someone else's property. I'm off to sleep a bit now.

P.P.P.S. We eventually decided that, not certain that our employer had any legitimate claim on the property, with the alarm raised, we were not going to manage to safely get the statue, the book, any of the paintings or “it.” So we decided to deny the enemy maximal use of those resources, and to torch the barracks. So last night Sophia and I (having the best throwing arms) tossed some bottles of gasoline with lit rags through the windows while the others shot rifles at the building to distract. Adrienne started glowing like a lantern, which kept several of the guards distracted and focusing on her -- great for Sophia and me, and apparently not so bad for Adrienne because the light protected her from some of the force of the bullets. We got the main building going, and Sophia also lit a side building, and beat a retreat -- I was hit twice as I ran for the wall, and passed out from shock. It's my understanding that Adrienne managed to use her magic to create a blinding light which blinded and dazzled many of the enemy, while Sabin pulled me over the wall. My injuries were fairly severe, but it turns out that my right hand was not crushed as Sabin had originally thought, so I have been resting and recuperating.

P.P.P.P.S. The employer in Albion had disappeared by the time we arrived. Very suspicious. Not what he seemed, I think. It's all puzzling, and we'll never know.

Selected Letters from Jersey Smith [from post session 23]

Lady's Month, 3015
From Loxley, Albion

Dear Beth,

As I suggested in the Post- Post- Post- Post- Script of my last letter, I've been looking into our █████ █████, █████ S████████. It turns out that, whoever Mr. S████████ really is, he's on a first-name basis with the bottom of the deck!

I've already reported to Reinhold the results of some poking around I did. The townhouse we met Mr. S████████ in did not, in fact, belong to him. He paid cash, monthly to the landlady, and had only started staying there one month before -- the landlady was shocked when S████████ disappeared. The Embassy denies any knowledge about a businessman with the name S████████. An attempt to find someone matching S████████'s style or description on passenger manifests leaving Loxley turned up nothing, which really isn't surprising. He's more slippery than a pocket full of pudding!

I suppose that, in the end, our mission turned out about as well as it could have -- though not thanks to us! At least if we were dupes of this criminal S████████, we were not successful in helping him. And our executive decision to damage the property stolen by the Reik, rather than leave it intact for their use and sale, also seems to have been right.

I regret that on this foray into ██████████, I found no sign of your Nanna. It's a bigger country than one is led to believe, from looking on a map!

We're shipping off to the ██████████, to join an ██████████ officer named L████████. It looks like an engineering job of just the sort that this crew is designed. I'll try to write, but I don't know when I'll be able to post my letters. Thank you for your last letter, which I shall read over and over until I receive your next. I remain,

Your Jersey

World News on the Eve of Shipping Out:

This is a bad few weeks for public figures, it seems. In Albion, the defense minister, Harold Breckinridge, was assassinated. The assassin was not caught, but it is widely believed that the shooting was the work of an Imperial spy. Meanwhile in Kislev, the czar and tzarevitch were attacked by two of the czar's personal guards, and the czar was killed. It was only through the actions of a loyal chekist that the tzarevitch was saved. Tzarina Ilsa Rebikov will act as regent until Vassily comes of age. Given her Imperial roots, this is viewed by some as being cause for concern.

The first all-metal aircraft was constructed in the Empire. But it is the Empire's zeppelins that are making the major headlines. Imperial zeppelins have bombed Loxley, resulting in

the deaths of a couple dozen people, injuring roughly twice as many, and causing a moderate amount of property damage. Although the casualties were not great -- a railway accident a week prior in northern Albion claimed many more lives than the attack on the capital did -- it is a great psychological blow to Albion, that their homeland is no longer entirely safe.

Sessions #21, 24: The Ghost in Glass

Yelenka's Diary [from Session 21]

Early Solnsevremya, 3014
Praag, Kislev

Dear Diary,

We were out enjoying the first blizzard of Spring on the Oblast. Djon has been a trooper about the cold, and it has been far more pleasant for me to do my solitary sojourn with his company.

As you know, we have a sled team; Baxter, Boris, Mina, Nebraska (also called Verena), Sivia and Olga. I mentioned to Djon that Olga was at least five weeks pregnant (probably by Baxter), and would be having pups in a couple weeks. He instantly put forward the opinion that it would be best for Olga's sake, for her to give birth someplace warm. Realizing that this was ridiculous, but also realizing that Djon was politely looking for a way to get out of the cold, I suggested we go to see Praag.

As you know, dear diary, I had only been in Praag once before, between the wars. But Djon had never been. The old saying certainly held true for us -- "If you come into Praag with no problems of your own, the locals will happily provide you with problems from their own supply."

Our first order of business was to arrange a kennel for the dogs. After that, we sold the extra wolf pelt and arranged a room. Djon was amazed at the spires, and I told him what I knew about how the masons carefully craft stonework which is likely to retain stability and beauty as it grows and twists over the decades from the background taint of chaos.

I thought it would make sense to start in the Praag Museum. I admit I hadn't visited on my last trip, but with Djon with me I had an excuse. He was anxious to see the exhibits on the Widow, but he indulged me by letting us approach via the art galleries. The painting of Meissner's *Boy with Flute* stands out in my mind.

Djon and I overheard a conversation between the owner of the gallery and a local, trying to sell a glass coffin. Djon was intrigued, while I acted the hardened Kislevarin and assumed it none of my business; though I engaged the gallery owner in a conversation, in which he told me about how that man was the brother of a local who had just been

hanged (Saint Verena be Praised) for causing the death of a little girl who had been placed in a glass box emulating "Arianka's Coffin." I suppose that she had been placed into the box to be part of a curiosity-seeker's display, and that her death had been accidental -- but I really have no basis for that supposition.

When Djon came back, he explained that the man, named Chaglyn, had the coffin which was haunted by the visage of Dazhia, the little girl who had been killed -- and that Djon had expressed an interest in getting the coffin, to set things right. I was very upset that this charlatan had wasted Djon's time, and figured that the gallery owner had probably been in on the scam -- that little scene having been set to get tourists' attention. But on seeing how intrigued Djon was, I thought to myself it might be good to see this deal to its conclusion -- if it cost us a few coins, at least it would be a harmless way for Djon to see some of the local culture.

We spent a long, uncomfortable time in Chaglyn's apartment, me looking for mirrors and wires and lights, before the light show in the coffin began. It was not gaudy, with flashing lights and loud gongs, but an understated screaming visage in the coffin. I passed myself between each possible source of light and the coffin, and the face was still visible. Admitting that I had no explanation, I questioned Chaglyn's crudeness in using the tragic coffin for profit, rather than seeing to it himself that the girl was put to rest.

It became clear that Chaglyn had us in an awkward position -- having no conscience himself, he could effectively blackmail any decent-hearted people to pay him for the privilege of taking the coffin off of his hands so they could address the problem. So Djon paid him the fifty kopek asking price, and I hired a couple strong locals to carry the coffin for us in their cart.

There are no temples of Morr in Praag; nor have any Amethyst wizards made themselves known, and of course the hags avoid the place. Our first stop was the temple of Dazh, hoping that we could get proper funeral services for the girl, at least because her family seems to have respected Dazh by giving her the name Dazhia. That was when we discovered that the priests of Dazh are nearly all blind from staring at the sun, so couldn't perceive the visage in the coffin. Idiots. We went on to the temple of Kalita, the god of trade, reckoning that at least there we might find someone running a service to bring in priests of Morr, hag witches or Amethyst wizards.

We made arrangements with a trader, Borodyn, at the temple of Kalita. Expecting a wise woman named Erdai to call on us some time tomorrow, we had the young men to wheel the coffin back to our room. I'm writing this by candlelight, and can see the apparition of the poor girl calling silently from her prison. But I can rest well knowing that we are doing right to get her freed soon.

Good night, dear diary.

Yelenalka's Diary [from Session 24]

Early Holodnyison, 3015
Praag, Kislev

Dear Diary,

I put together a nice spread for Erdai. She seemed very happy with the kvas and sausages, but sniffed the cheese disapprovingly (eating some anyhow). The cigarettes were clearly welcome. And she honored my gift, by bundling it all up (with the tablecloth, so we had to pay a little extra to the hotel) when she left.

Her advice confirmed our suspicions. That Dazhia needed to be put to rest. But a service had already been done for the body, so it was a deeper problem. She suggested some things (favorite doll, message for her family), but the one that felt right was justice. I worried that Vechel may have had accomplices.

Djon got us into Vechel's house, to see if we could find anything of interest. Nothing directly.

A visit to the Courthouse proved fruitful. I admit to being a little worried at using the Chill Voice spell so much, from fear that my face will freeze that way. But it is really helpful. We saw autopsy reports, police reports, and read the evidence. The more we read, the clearer it was that the investigation had been sloppy. We begin to wonder if Vechel had been guilty of anything -- he insisted that the coffin had been used without his knowledge, and that he was dumping the body from fear that he would be blamed for the murder (already being involved in a sketchy industry, as a curiosity vendor).

Dazhia had begun to mutate, just before her murder -- and though from the point of view of the police it seemed only to be a curiosity, we suspected that it was related. Normally, in Praag, when a child undergoes "the change" a Wise Woman is hired to bring the child elsewhere. We began to wonder if one of the parents, too cheap to offer sausages, smokes and herring, decided to do this deed him or herself -- and to implicate Vechel in the process. It also seemed possible, even likely, that the parents were disagreed.

Examination of the evidence made us suspect a few people. The police may have been right about Vechel. The stepmother, Cassamira, the father, Valentine, and Vechel's assistant, Yevgenya were also on our short list.

Djon broke into the parents' house, to see if he could find any evidence. He brought back photos of Dazhia with her natural mother and father, and of her stepmother with her father; and also her stuffed bunny toy.

The toy was calming, but not sufficient to put her to rest (we were unsurprised). We performed a double-blind test, in which I watched the screaming girl's visage for changes while -- out of sight of me -- Djon displayed photos alternately of Dazhia's father,

Valentine, natural mother, and stepmother Cassamira. She was definitely reacting even more violently, when presented with photographs of the stepmother.

Then left Djon to do the most distasteful, dangerous dirty work himself, of confronting the stepmother. He chose, quite wisely, to bring the coffin. I helped him to get the coffin into the family living room, while the stepmother was out taking laundry. Then I departed, and Djon waited to confront her. Meanwhile I settled our debts on the room and with the kennel, and got packed to leave (for we were concerned that this confrontation would not go well).

Hardly any confrontation was needed. When the stepmother entered the room, she began choking. Djon had suspected that the ghost would take violent action for justice. Djon pushed the stepmother into the coffin, and watched until she was choked to death -- after which there was no more visage of the girl, and she had been put to rest.

Djon left the coffin where it was; we are both concerned about Dazhia's father, Valentine, but I understand why Djon didn't leave a note! I know that I was terribly unfair to Djon, leaving him the worst to deal with, so we drove in silence a while (well, I drove -- I made sure he had a couple bottles of kvas to drink).

We've since camped. We're on our way to visit Novevka, and then we'll play it by ear. It was a short visit to Praag, but on the plus side Moorslieb wasn't full during our visit.

Good night, dear diary.

Yelenalka's Diary [from after Session 24]

Early Solnsevremya, 3015
Praag, Kislev

Dear Diary,

I've been so busy with pleasant, personal tasks, that I haven't written as much as I should -- apart from those few notes about my family, and Oleg's new wife Sasha, and about the spelunking with Djon, under the pretext of looking for Arianka. Surely neither of us expects to get anywhere with such a quest, but it is an interesting diversion.

Olga and the puppies, as you know, were left with my family. We just since picked them up, and spent a couple days with Mama and Poppa again. Devora has claimed one puppy (naming him "Djon," and thereby inflating Djon's already too-big ego, with her obvious and annoying crush). The other six are all in good health, and when they are just a bit older -- after they've run with the pack a bit -- we'll sell one or two off to a trainer. Our four male additions are named Nikifor, Peya, Ruslan and Timofei; our two female additions are named Karina and Snezhana.

Until next time,

[Sessions #25–26, 28–29: Keep Out the Borderland]

Selected Letters from Jersey Smith [from session 25]

[Written on ancient papyrus, that Jersey found wedged between stones in the tomb]

Late Sigmarzeit, 3015 (perhaps never posted)

Dear Beth,

I wanted to thank you again for your last letter. It gives me strength, reminding me what we are here fighting to preserve.

We were met in the Borderlands by our driver, an Albionian named Corporal Richardson. On our way to meet Lowell we ran into some trouble -- a bandit attack, during which time a Sylvanian plane flew overhead and dropped explosives on a site a few miles away.

After taking care of the bandits, we drove to the site of the bombing. It was out of our way, but we presumed that hands would be needed to recover from the attack. We drove as close as we could, and hiked the last half mile to the site.

The site of the attack appears to have been a civilian archaeological expedition, into an ancient Nehekharan tomb. Outside the tomb, we met a graduate student, Lucas Foster, who sure knows his stuff about those Nehekharins. Lucas was as puzzled as us about why the Sylvanians would bomb the expedition, but it trapped most of their expedition inside, including professors Little and Cartright.

As we approached the site, Lucas called on us to sign ourselves in a respectful manner to the tomb. I'm an open-minded fellow -- when in Remas, do as the Remans do -- so I did. I hope we won't offend any-body, living or spirits long passed.

We started helping Lucas by pulling stones and shoring up entrance ways. Sergeant Durand, who I was pleased to meet for the first time, quickly came up with a plan to open a way through the rubble.

That was when Reinhold first spotted the Sylvanian convoy, coming into the valley. The leader of the convoy was a strangely familiar man, who, eventually, we recalled as Gadzo Princip -- the Cabanallan who assassinated Sylvanian Archduke Lenhard Lang. But that's impossible on so many levels, including that Princip had been captured and imprisoned.

We started to set up a defense -- not enough to repel the attackers very long, but hopefully long enough to extract survivors and make our way out. Robert and Kargun set

up charges to block the easiest entrance into the valley, Sophia and Reinhold set up a defensive line near the rubble, and I proceeded along the top of the mountains to snipe at the convoy as they proceeded on the mountain pass.

Shooting out a tire (of our abandoned vehicle, which had been stolen by the approaching force), I hoped that would slow them, and fell back to our next position. There, Sophia, Reinhold and I made a stand. I got hit in the left arm and lost a lot of blood, but the wizard used healing magic to bring me back to consciousness. Of course, that wasn't until after the group had been under enough fire that they pulled back inside the tomb itself, and blew the entrance shut. I'm assured that the engineers can get us out -- but first we hope to find the trapped team.

There were sounds of battle outside the blasted entrance, and some talk about "undead temple guardians" fighting the assaulting forces . . . but I don't know that anybody got a good look -- I suspect it's really some tough locals, fighting to drive back the Sylvanians, but since they may not recognize us as friend -- and we have civilians to save -- I agree with the command decision by Reinhold for us to press on.

As we moved through, we avoided touching anything scarab-like. Apparently that's impolite, and likely to be met with a curse or trap or something. We moved through slowly, to take care of the antiquities -- but not so slowly that we could avoid all the traps and impediments. We kept calling ahead for the Professors and the rest of their group, and trying to follow their trails.

The next room shifted and rotated. The engineers seemed to have already explored, and knew their way through to find the tracks of the archaeologists. Next was a large room with painted walls to resemble the night sky, and several exits. It appeared that the group had gone down some stairs, so we took those. I guess that they were in a hurry to get deeper, after hearing the shelling.

After that was a room depicting -- well, no, really *containing* -- a sort of mini version of the Sun. When we got too close it burned. And there were traps in the room. Again, there were several interesting rooms off of the area, but the tracks didn't go through any of them. As we were looking around spikes and noxious gas attacked us; I tripped a trap and was affected by some of the dust, and my throat is still constricting. It appears that the group approached a jeweled throne (the whole place is swimming with sparkling treasure and the like) -- looking at the throne myself, I found a catch behind which are some more stairs. We presume that this is where the professors went.

With all the healing that our White Wizard, Adrienne, has been doing, I'm afraid she's starting to mutate more. She's now got a milky film all over her eyes, which must make it hard for her to see. I hope that she doesn't turn into a chaos spawn on our account.

Anyhow, we're stopped for just a bit, so I stopped to write.

With love, Jersey

Selected Letters from Jersey Smith [from session 26]

[Written on ancient papyrus, that Jersey found wedged between stones in the tomb]

Late Sigmarzeit, 3015 (perhaps never posted)

Dear Folks,

Hi Ma, hi Pa!

Boy is this going to be a hard letter to get to you. But if you get it, it must mean that we got out of this awful spot OK -- which means I'm OK so don't get all choked up! I've got the most compassionate and courageous commander in the world; come Chaos Wastes or high water he'll keep this team safe. And, for that matter, the fact that we've got a White Wizard on staff really means that we're safe as can be expected.

I hope that Oklahoma is doing as promised and taking good care of you all.

So guess where we are! Or, rather, were!

In a Nehekharan tomb! How we got here is a long story, and is in the letter that I posted to Beth. Ask her for details.

We were met in the Borderlands by our driver, an Albionian named Corporal Richardson. On our way to meet Lowell we ran into some trouble -- a bandit attack, during which time a Sylvanian plane flew overhead and dropped explosives on a site a few miles away.

After taking care of the bandits, we drove to the site of the bombing. It was out of our way, but we presumed that hands would be needed to recover from the attack. We drove as close as we could, and hiked the last half mile to the site.

The site of the attack appears to have been a civilian archaeological expedition, into an ancient Nehekharan tomb. Outside the tomb, we met a graduate student, Lucas Foster, who sure knows his stuff about those Nehekharans. Lucas was as puzzled as us about why the Sylvanians would bomb the expedition, but it trapped most of their expedition inside, including professors Little and Cartwright.

Anyhow I don't need to write a lot of details but to say a couple things of interest.

We've fought some actual real ~~live~~ zombies. I got cut up a bit, but the White Wizard patched me up. And we heard the sounds of the Professor and his crew, who'd been lost and who we were rescuing, sounding like they were fighting with something. So we sort of rushed the fight against the zombies, and Kargun and the Lieutenant went up some

stairs that appeared to be going the wrong direction just in case they might loop back to where the people were.

The rest of us stayed, under my command, to look for a sliding wall or such to get to the voices. And, sure enough, we found one. That's where a bunch of large mummified cats were, aching for a taste of halfling flesh. With a sharpshooter like Miss Sophia, a White Wizard like Adrienne and a ferret like Albert, my job of command was easy as pie; we managed to take 'em all out fast enough with only a couple scratches here and there.

The other thing is, well, I wanted to thank Pa for raising me like he did. Boy, are we surrounded by a lot of temptation here! In this untouched tomb, there were gems right up to my eyeballs in one room. Any handful of those gems would have paid off the ranch, and any one of them would have made the most perfect engagement ring for Beth. But we're here with a team that represents a university in Albion, and under the legal authority of the local (allied) government, we ain't got no right to take nothin' from here. I suppose a part of me wanted to write you this letter, so as to get my own head in order -- so I can remember the lessons you taught me, and I can be confident that you would never approve of my bringing a handful or rubies back, and that if I got an engagement ring this way I would be unworthy of Beth.

Regards to all the other folk on the ranch, and to pastor Parham!

With respect and love in Sigmar,

Jersey

Selected Letters from Jersey Smith [from session 28]

[Written on ancient papyrus, that Jersey found wedged between stones in the tomb]

Late Sigmarzeit, 3015 (perhaps never posted)

Dear Beth,

We're trying to escort a whole line of academics to safety, now. Everywhere we go, we find walking dead. And traps, but you already knew about that.

Since the main entrance to the tomb was sealed by the attacking Sylvanians, our one hope has been this claim that one of the academics knew of a separate subterranean exit. We've been counting on that, and going deeper and deeper to find it. But, then, the engineers may have killed us all; as we explored the tomb, Robert got a little spooked, and Kargun threw a grenade at pillars holding up one of the rooms, bringing the whole room down. There had been several exits from that room and one may have been our exit.

We fought human skeletons and cat mummies. Bullets didn't do much to the skeletons, but a grenade did some damage, and I was able to use my lasso to hold one at a time

while Reinhold and Sophia beat them down. Others fought a mummified horse (near the front of our expedition). And, of course, whatever gave the engineers a fright is probably under the rubble. Forgive my Bretonnian, but enough is enough! I have had it with these [REDACTED]'s undead in this [REDACTED]'s tomb!

Necessity forgives a lot. We've been avoiding taking valuables or artifacts which have to be catalogued and belong to the local government, but after these fights several people took weapons from the skeletal guardsmen's foot lockers. The commander made the right call, of course; life before property.

Since there is no way to post this letter until we are well out of danger, you can rest assured that if you have this letter then we have survived.

I pray that I'll be able to see you again,

Jersey

Selected Letters from Jersey Smith [from session 29]

[On his own paper]

Late Sigmarzeit, 3015

Dear Folks,

Hi Ma, Hi Pa!

That last letter to you, like my last letter to Beth, were extra long because I had to detail all sorts of interesting events in the tomb -- but all my notes had been written on paper that I realized came from the tomb! Allow me to explain.

In addition to all the laws covering the tomb, it really does seem like there was some ancient curse! On being cautioned about it, I put back the scraps of parchment which I figured nobody would ever care about. Those were the scraps on which I had written my original letters to you and Beth.

Given all the hardships we'd been through my writing hand was tired. So I didn't finish the whole story or explain why I never posted the original letters! Anyhow, please ask Beth to fill you in on some details, and please fill her in on things that didn't make it into my letter to her.

So how do I know it wasn't just legends? Well, let me explain. We made it back to the room-with-the-sun, and found another way out of the room. The way out was a long drop that went down extra deep. Using my lasso, my rope and some extra rope from the archaeologists, we made a system by which we could rappel safely down to the bottom;

Robert and I went to scout. At the bottom was a room with images suggesting a curse and certain death to those who took anything from the tomb. Seeing no threat in there, I proceeded up to scout a long staircase from that bottom-most point all the way to the surface, double-checking the door by cracking it an inch or two (and shutting it again on realizing how close to the Sylvanian camp that exit is). I went back to tell the others, and they rappelled down.

After the engineers and Sophia were up top, and Adrienne and Reinhold down at the room at the base of the stairs with the archaeologists, with me halfway up in case needed by either group, trouble started.

Zombies and the mummy-cats suddenly flowed out of a door into the room. Adrienne, Reinhold, Helena Little (the archaeologists' trap expert) and Jack Brenner (the archaeologist's guard and guide through bandit country) started to attack, and unfortunately allowed themselves be trapped in the room instead of evacuating up the stairs and getting advantage of ground where they could limit how many of the enemy were attacking.

I joined in their fight against the undead, though I kept a position on the stairs with Jack Brenner from which I could fire at the cats and zombies. Blocking the zombies and mummified cats proved very difficult. Reinhold and Adrienne suffered the worst of it. At one point Adrienne's arm was hanging limp and Reinhold's forehead was bleeding something fierce. I'm glad I was there, and also glad that Robert, Kargun and Sophia were at the top to watch the door for Sylvanians (we used the position of 2nd team to good effect). I helped take down a couple of the undead and even the odds (I also got a touch hurt, but that goes with the job).

At one point, a mummified cat took an opportunity to lurch right past us. On being warned about the approaching cat, Sophia lost her nerve and ran out the door (possibly alerting the Sylvanians to our presence). I guess that the earlier fights with the cats and zombies had really shaken her up. The engineers failed to stop the cat before it bust out of the door that Sophia had left open. The door shut on its own, right after both Sophia and the cat were out.

When we realized that all of the undead were trying to get past us, it became clear that they were determined to get some prey besides us. The obvious explanation is that they were enforcing the curse warned about throughout the tomb -- off to fight against any who had removed treasure from the tomb. We presumed at first that the Professor had absent-mindedly taken something (all professors are absent-minded), or was planning to bring it to a local museum, and so had inadvertently brought the curse down on himself. And we fought hard of course, figuring that we'd yell at the Professor later. But it turns out that the undead cat flew right past the Professor when it went out the door, which could only mean one thing -- that the undead were out to take down the Sylvanians (who had probably looted a bit before collapsing the entrance).

At this point, we were more concerned that the remaining undead would be too injured to do much against the Sylvanian machine guns, and this would have alerted the Sylvanians to our hiding position. So we fought the battle to the conclusion (apart from the one cat which is no doubt attacking the Sylvanians in their tents, right now). By taking advantage of their determination to get out the door, I was able to allow a couple of them to go up the stairs without interference -- splitting their forces in a controlled way, calling up to the engineers to expect a couple incoming, and evening the fight. Indeed, Kargun and Robert had no difficulty defending against the undead. And I think that by letting those two out I may have prevented Adrienne or Reinhold from falling in battle.

So we paid the price for the thieving Sylvanians. We were good-hearted enough to leave behind all the treasure, from respect for the local nation and its traditions. And, to be honest, from the sense that the mummy and his curse could follow a thief on for ages. But now that we've faced the curse, and been good-hearted and decent enough to do what's right despite having paid the price for another's wrong-doing (which doesn't mean that we won't teach those Sylvanian thieves a lesson for their wrong-doing, what happened to us hurt!). But even though we paid the price for another's transgression, we will not touch the treasure -- we are following in the footsteps of Sigmar.

Now we've just got a handful of Sylvanians to get by. I'm pretty confident about the Stockboys' ability to get out of this!

I think it's time for us to move out so I'll finish this letter, and remain

Your Loving Son,

Jersey

Session #27: I Need This Like I Need Another Hole in the Ground

Yelenalka's Diary [from after Session 27]

Mid Solnsevremya, 3015
Chervaske, Kislev

Dear Diary,

Baba Lukyana directed us to patrol north of the Lynsk River, along the border of troll country. Up until now it has been fairly uneventful -- some signs of troll incursions -- a missing child or two, and one cow which I suspect was really butchered by the owners who sold the meat on the gray market to escape duties -- but nothing out of the ordinary.

We came to the settlement of Chervaske. It consists of a salt mine owned by the private mining company, Volkov Mining Company, and some support industry. On our arrival we found that the mine workers were on strike.

The workers are indistinct in their complaints -- and as such they are uncertain about what they are asking for that is in the power of the owners to concede. They are harming their own case by arguing against the Tzar's draft, general (counterproductive, and probably illegal, especially in time of war) discontent over the regency being held by the Reikish-born Empress Dowager, and confounding their sorrows from inflation with miseries over which the mining company has some power. I have encouraged them to find one or two spokesmen, who can stay on message and be clear about what settlements may be best for both the mining company and the workers into the future. I have also encouraged them to rely on Djon as a mediator.

Several men in a government truck came in the midst of this, though their interest does not appear to be the strike per se; a government-type, a couple poised guards who I take to be chekists, and one more person who appears to be a foreign national (if I can get close enough to hear his accent, perhaps I could place his origin). There are no signs that they were either working to resolve the strike, or acting as an advance military group to force the miners back to work, during this stage of the war when the Kislev government cannot afford to let its supply lines diminish.

The next day, when the new arrivals went into the mine shaft with the owner, Volkov, Djon followed to learn what he could. By the time they all surfaced, it was clear that Djon was presenting himself as a representative of BASC (the bureau of arachnid-sodium control). Apparently there have been a number of sightings of salt spiders, and Djon -- knowing the correlation between salt-spider presence and warpstone -- used this guise to learn more. The owner certainly believes there to be both warpstone and salt spiders in the mine. My understanding is that the government men will be bringing in prisoners to mine the warpstone -- though this is bad news for the local workers, there is no person to blame for there being warpstone in the mines, they certainly will not be served by continuing to work in a warpstone mine (even less so when there are salt spiders around). Perhaps some of them can take on consulting services (perhaps training the convicts, keeping machinery in good repair, or even guarding the prison camp).

Until next time,

Session #30: Lowell of Araby

Shortly after the battle with the undead deep in the tomb, Adrienne collapsed from a combination of her injuries and the excessive spellcasting she'd been called on to do over the previous day. The Stockboys waited out the Sylvanians. Once the soldiers seemed to be gone, the Stockboys ventured out to find the valley had been swept clean of any sign that anyone had ever been there, including both the archaeologists' and your own vehicle having been removed. Of Sophia, there was no sign.

The Stockboys, along with the archaeologists, made the long journey back to town on foot. There, Sabin caught up with the group, and they raised a drink to their missing

comrade and got the archaeologists to wire for money to get the Stockboys new transportation in thanks for having rescued them from the tomb.

They then traveled to the Albionian encampment, where they learned that there had been a kink in the Albionians' plans. They were to raid or destroy a supply train coming from Sylvania to the Badlands, but they were meant to have the assistance of additional forces from their Kislevite allies. Only, just one day prior, word was received that the Kislevites were making peace with the Central Powers. Captain Lowell was despondent and said that he didn't have the manpower to take on the heavily guarded supply train, never mind the question of what would happen in the coming months, with Albion's allies rapidly evaporating (Bretonnia is not expected to last much longer, either).

The engineers, though short on explosives, came up with a plan to cut the tracks in a manner that would not be apparent to the coming train until it was too late. Lt. Smith suggested that additional force might be gained from one of the local goblin tribes in exchange for a share of the spoils. Eventually, Capt. Lowell was convinced of the plan and it was set in motion.

Short version: The battle happened. Your side won. There was a tank, and good use of terrain and Molotov cocktails, and the goblin cavalry. But I think the most important bit for incorporating into the moving picture that will doubtless one day be made is the image of Sabin on a camel, swooping up Adrienne and riding off with her into the [direction that] sunset [would be in a few hours].

World events:

Peace has broken out between Kislev and its neighbors. Reports as to the reaction among Kislev's citizens are mixed, with some praising the wisdom of their young new tsar for restoring peace to the land, and others darkly muttering at the foul treachery of his mother the tsarina for toadying to her Reikish relations and their allies. The reaction of Kislev's former allies in the war against the central powers is decidedly unmixed, however, with Albion being furious, Bretonnia distraught, and recent ally Tilea put out. The Border Principalities have seen a flurry of activity, but, as always, individual nations have reacted quite differently: Cabanal has cursed Kislev and redoubled its efforts against the central powers; Vardanos staunchly maintains its neutrality; Styrtia continues to be divided among itself; and so on.

In fact, perhaps the best new hope for assistance against the central powers now is the fact that Norscan raids have started to increase noticeably in the north, distracting the Imperial navy somewhat -- but also taking a hefty toll on Albion, on the port city of Erengard in Kislev, and on Marienburg, with even the occasional foray along the coast of Bretonnia. But the Empire, perhaps unsurprisingly given its geographic position, has taken the brunt of the Norscan aggression. Several captured Imperial vessels have made further Norscan raids somewhat more fearsome as well, although there is a question as to

how long the ignorant Norscans will be able to maintain modern ships. They do seem to have taken to modern firearms quite well.

Despite military victories, and the diplomatic success of the ceasefire with Kislev, blockades have caused privation and starvation within the Empire, leading to discontent; in addition to rationing, the Reikish army has threatened to impose martial law over certain territories. The food shortages are being especially felt in the Moot. When told that young Mootlanders might find themselves without pie for Pie Week, Kaiser Wilhelm Jones is said to have replied, "Let them eat cake!"

Session #31: Butterbridge's Butter-Running Blockade-Busting Barge

[Anders's report to Lt. Aerwyn]

I passed along your offer to Sgt. Brogarsson. While he seemed a bit wistful at the thought of getting out of that unit, I get the impression he intends to stick it out until he receives a command of his own.

The Stockboys received the cargo and barge from Butterbridge. First thing they did was hire someone else on to pole the barge up the river, who gave the name Brad Protagonist.

The first potential trouble we ran into was while still in the Badlands. A bunch of wolf-riding goblins started shooting at the barge. Someone identified them as a Gorkish tribe, so Lt. Kriegspiel called out that we were affiliated with the Empire, and the goblins called off their attack. This probably was better for the goblins than for us, seeing as they had already succeeded in self-inflicting wounds on a couple of their own, while there had been not a single injury to anyone on board the barge.

In the Border Princes, things became more complicated. In the town of Brovska, the harbormaster had been murdered. Out of respect, no new harbormaster would be appointed until Harbormaster Linton's murder was solved -- which meant that no vessels were being allowed through the locks. Sabin, Kargun, and the unit's white mage, Adrienne, checked out the body and determined Linton had been poisoned. They drew a blood sample from the corpse at the man's wake and determined it was some sort of heavy metal poisoning.

The unit spoke with the man's widow and with various council members (Hebpt, a decent guy, with shipping interests in the west; Aver, some pro-Reik asshole; Jenka and Lucy, a green wizard and her ferret familiar -- what's with ferrets and mages anyhow?; and Jenks, the harbormaster heir apparent). Linton had apparently had a sudden change of heart about the construction of a canal and the route it should take, and had been pushing the project through at great expense just prior to his death. Adrienne learned from the green mage of the Pecto Gulch, where Linton had been surveying just before experiencing his change of heart; we rented a wagon to go check it out.

The white mage sensed dark magics in the area. We followed the harbormaster's trail into an underground passageway that appeared to have been carved rather than naturally occurring. Eventually, there were sounds ahead in the darkness. Lieutenant Kriegspiel sent me with Sabin to scout ahead, despite the fact that I couldn't see anything in the pitch dark and Sabin, well, you remember him stomping about in the forest when he was briefly assigned to our unit. He was a lot more stealthy underground, though -- comes with being a dwarf, I guess? (I mean to say that I guess he's a dwarf? That's how people were referring to him, despite the fact that I've never seen a dwarf that tall and skinny before.) I couldn't report anything back myself -- the aforementioned pitch blackness and not wanting to use a flashlight and alert whatever subterranean creatures were making the noise -- but Sabin swore once we reported back to the lieutenant that there were skaven building a wall across the tunnel. And he spoke about legends concerning some spiked tail weapon that might conceivably match the wounds inflicted on the harbormaster.

Robert, the other engineer, surmised that the harbormaster had intended the canal to flood the rat's den, and that the rat-creatures took out the harbormaster first. After some discussion, a plan was hatched for the white mage to cast a spell to blind the creatures and light up the area for those of us who weren't dwarves. We would capture one of these supposed skaven, which would hopefully have the tail weapon that Sabin had described, and bring it back to the council as evidence.

Well, whether they were skaven or beastmen I couldn't say for sure, but they were certainly rodents of unusual size. I shot a couple and Adrienne healed one of them up for questioning, though the questioning was left for the town council. They rushed Jenks through his appointment to harbormaster, and then he rushed our barge through the locks. The town council also intended to finish up the canal and flood any other ratpeople that might be lurking in the tunnels.

After that, we reached the dwarven kingdoms, where there was some prophecy involving Sabin. Something along the lines of "If you let him through it will be our end times, and you know it's true because it rhymes." Sabin gave a fake name, though, so they let us through. The details of the prophecy had to do with the Empire attacking it, and since the dwarven nation had up until this point remained neutral in the war, I don't see it as an entirely bad thing that there is now one more nation aligned against the Empire. Granted, it would have been better if they'd done so before the Empire got in the first strike. The dwarven kingdom is in a weakened state now.

Eventually we reached the delivery location and the Mootlanders carted away the butter. And with that taken care of, I look forward to being reassigned back to a more meaningful post.

Sessions #32–33: A Familiar Face

[from session 32]

The journey to Altdorf was pleasant, if uncomfortably warm. I'll miss all the puppies -- we sold off the sled dogs to a breeder, except for little Taal. So far our attempts to find Rudiger have been for naught. But it's important enough to Emina, and Emina is important enough to Djon, that I don't regret our efforts so far. We will be checking the bar where Lars Nylund said his farewells.

We remain concerned that Rudiger may have met a terrible end, because Lars (a bloodthirsty Norscan) was the last to see him, and had carefully manoevered to be certain that nobody else in the circus knew (the late Nylund's excuse that he "didn't want to be stuck with the bill for drinks" seems a little thin). But it's also possible that he wanted to not be found and Lars was helping him -- in which case with this trail months cold I worry that we'll be unequipped to find anything.

We had a nice diversion. We met Reinhold's brother, Fredrich Kriegspiel. The two are exactly the same. Each has an unhealthy fascination (Reinhold with weapons, Fredrich with ladies' unmentionables). Each seems prone to anger (Reinhold at everyone, Fredrich at Reinhold). Fredrich was drafted, and believes he would not have been subject to the draft if Reinhold had stayed to fight for the Reik instead of joining a mercenary group.

Fredrich is working as an Aide de Camp to Colonel Riefenstahl -- the human who heads some specialist halfling unit. Since Fredrich seemed personable and welcoming to Djon and myself, perhaps that would be one way to find Rudiger -- specialist teams would probably at least have access to Reikish lists of known or suspected wizards. And Rudiger's supposed special ability to cure mutation could be of especial interest to any army.

If we need leverage over the Colonel, it could help that we learned he has a mistress.

In retrospect, the fact that Reinhold's brother is just about as academically inclined and erudite as Reinhold, makes one wonder about his business in the "Bücher." Perhaps related to the delivery he had to make? For Riefenstahl?

So what's next? Enlist Fredrich for help in our search? Check out Die Katze und die Geige, the bar where Lars and Rudiger supposedly said farewell? Put an ad in the paper "Seeking Aqshy [fire magic] specialist, with circus experience and an academic interest in mutation?"

[from session 33]

We have so little time! We must fly South as quickly as we can and go over the hills into Tilean territory, so that we can get a message to Lt. Reinhold via Headquarters. Reinhold is in a perfect position to achieve some Allied aims, if only we can smuggle him into the Empire soon enough. I have charted a course through the Moot, as the quickest safest way to avoid patrols and make the border soon -- but also so we can do some investigating ourselves.

The time to strike is soon. Riefenstahl has been collecting some sort of precious cargo from the Hobby Shop in the Moot -- some ancient magic we presume. To what ends?

Djon and I did a little intelligence work. We checked out the receipts in the “Bücher” -- Fredrich had gotten an old manuscript entitled “A Dissertation on Dispellation” and the Summer 2512 issue of the journal WAND. Djon spoke with the Wesson halflings who had been transporting the heavy package from the Moot -- about 2' square and 6" high. In an effort to determine what they were carrying, Djon, pretending to be working with Fredrich, asked that they “bring him another one,” to which they agreed -- but we still don't know what another one **is!**

Riefenstahl has been at the forefront of the Reikish testing of dangerous new weapons, as we saw at the front so long ago. With Riefenstahl's aide-de-camp being Reinhold's twin, Fredrich, this is an intelligence-gathering opportunity we dare not pass up!

In other news, we have a description of the blond man who was the last one seen with Rudiger: late 30s or early 40s, fit and average height. The circus has moved on, with Emina, but we still have some hopes of finding Rudiger -- though it will have to wait until we have determined what Fredrich is transporting for Riefenstahl from the Moot.

Session #34: Let Them Eat Cake!

Dear Diary,

Djon and I stopped in Townsville for the Pie Week festivities, on our way through the Reik. It is getting easier to travel here now that Kislev and the Empire are at peace.

Shortly after getting off the train, we saw Reinhold! Big ol' puppy dog that he is, he started barking about shooting me for desertion. But after reminding him that there are things I could say to a military tribunal and -- more importantly -- after buying some beer, he cooled down.

So it turns out that Riefenstahl was ordering “warding sigils” from the Hobby Shop. These ancient stones -- there are eleven left, after the one which Riefenstahl took -- surround a purported chaos pit, which has remained sealed for 2000 years. The magic (on the other eleven) is serious stuff, and seems to be part of the magic seal on the gate itself.

A few months ago, I might have just left it be, for the Empire to get itself overrun with creatures from beyond the warp -- it would add an extra front to their war, just as Kislev has always had an extra front from the warp pits to the far North. But now that we are at peace, I can't easily wish that on the soft and naive Reikish population.

I was amused to meet the young woman that Reinhold had brought in as a magical expert. Adrienne is a clever woman, but her too-bookish and superstition-laden form of magic is for fools -- she has strange bug-eyes and a five-o'clock shadow, suggest some

disturbing mutation, so she clearly isn't very good at avoiding feedback. Really, the sorts of magic she is practicing ought to be left to men. Her pet ferret, Albert, is adorable.

Adrienne and I visited the Hobby Shop. The impression I get is that they were not directly responsible for the theft of the warding sigil, instead putting the Wessons up to it. They are not permitted into the "Arena" and, from their enthusiasm, seemed to have been successfully kept away. Sophia gets along well with the Wessons – the organized crime family here in the Moot. So she can probably find out more.

Anyway, until next time!

Session #35: The Hunger Games

No recap was written, so you'll have to make do with the follow-up as to what happened immediately after:

Sometime shortly after the Great Pie Week Massacre, one of the Stockboys (I'm guessing it was probably Adrienne, given her inexplicable paranoia about chaos) noticed a second gap in the warding sigils around the edges of the arena. You are certain it was there before the pie eating contest began, as evidenced by the splatter of banana cream that stops abruptly at where the sigil should have been, indicating that the stone had to have been removed sometime after the food fight started.

Assuming Ma Wesson is questioned about the incident, she is shocked, simply shocked, at the implication that a Wesson had something to do with-- aw, hell, never could keep a straight face. Still, she can't be expected to keep track of everything her boys get up to. Harrold and Roland were instrumental in helping to save Pie Week, though, and they seem to have left town.
