

THE ART OF ELOQUENCE

A Guide to the Known Cultures and Races in Zurn
Written by Arthur Wordsworth Clementine

Dear Traveler,

This tome contains my knowledge of cultures and races across our fair land through firsthand experience. My journal is a rough sketch of my journeys, and everything in its pages is true. Mostly.

I started my journey when I was twenty-three. I am now on the verge of turning thirty-one, but I feel much older from my travels. I have spoken to kings, learned languages on the fly, sung songs that made men weep, and run from very, very large creatures. But like the journal I carried on my journeys which is now in your hands, I survived every encounter.

Some of what follows describes harrowing adventures from my travels, some due to mistakes I invited on myself (often unknowingly). So if you desire to avoid similar experiences in the future, I think you will find this tome well worth the 2 Advancement Points you paid for it.

May your work be blessed as you travel across our fair land: it's a beautiful, wonderful world, despite how dangerous it may be at times; take it from one who knows,

A. W.

SECTION I: THE KINGDOM OF ARDEN (HUMANS)

Day 1

I started from the town of Stamgard in the Kingdom of Arden. My parents have lived here all their lives, and I've come to call this little stockade town home. My father had a knife that he took with him everywhere as a young man, and today he gave it to me as a gift before leaving home. My mother gave me a sturdy satchel for carrying my books and ink, and my brother gave me this journal, telling me to fill it with stories of faraway lands and great exploits. He is nine, and likes to read of daring knights and great battles.

I confess that I hope to avoid both of those like the Satyran Plague.

I plan to head north toward the Glade, and make my appearance before their king, Filian of the Cheval clan. I have heard that he is a powerful but amiable leader.

I have made camp in a cave beside the road. It is small but dry, and it looks like rain. I shall write again tomorrow.

Arthur

Day 2

Rain all day so far; I will likely be holed up in this cave all day. My mind has grown restless, so I thought I'd tell you, my dear reader (you don't mind me calling you that, do you? I rather like the sound of it, and think I shall use it from this point onward), about my homeland.

Our town is located on the outskirts of a human kingdom, and arguably the greatest in Zurn. The Kingdom of Arden is a modest kingdom with a good king: Arn, the Fifth of that name. Common courtesy involves the proper bow, introduction, and the generally universal rule of not insulting the lady or gentleman on the throne. Their strongest allies are the elves of the Eldar Enclave, the centaurs of the Glade, and the Saber Colonies of the High Mountains that tower over our kingdom.

Decades ago our kingdom was threatened by the Sixth Legion of the Krutalak Army, a horde of giants that live in the mountains just beyond our borders. As they rampaged through the marches and toward the capitol, our king called for aid from his neighbors, and it was the centaurs of The Glade that answered.

Humans tend to react kindly (and strongly) to the pull and tug of alliances and the need to maintain longstanding duties, agreements, and friendships. Among the men of Arden this is especially true, as this desire for camaraderie and brotherhood runs through all of us (even those of us who would not fancy ourselves as warriors).

We also value trade, as it is a way for a weak creature to gain strength, and for a modest kingdom to gain the

dependence that may provide survival. Should you find yourself in a human town, focus on these points when interacting with them. You will resonate with their underlying desires, and will find more success.

The rain stopped. Perhaps I will attempt to travel by night to make up for lost time.

Arthur

Day 3

Dear Reader,

Last night was a harrowing experience. I came across three spectres in the dark, and they accosted me and searched me for gold. As you can imagine I had none, so they told me that they would take what I did have: my dagger, satchel, provisions, and my walking stick.

I attempted to persuade them, but my stammering tongue and knocking knees did me no good. Eventually I opted to run for my life, and thankfully they were more talk than substance and I was able to escape.

That sensation of chilling coldness around me, though, as I was in their presence was unnerving. I have never been that scared in my life.

I would rest, but my adrenaline is still too high. I can barely write with a steady hand. I must press on - we are almost to the border of our kingdom, and will be setting out into The Wilds tomorrow. But more on that tomorrow.

Arthur

SECTION II: THE WILDS (ALL CULTURES)

Day 5

Reader,

My apologies for not writing yesterday - what a day it was. I was traveling to the Greater Wood following the road, when I was beset by a troop of riders who appeared from a distance as being from a Wild Man tribe. They live all throughout The Wilds, so this is not uncommon. Since they are typically desirous of treasure I prepared myself again to plead my case of poverty, but to my surprise, they did not ask anything of the sort.

They were warrioresses - Amazons, as we call them in Arden - from a small tribe known as Janys. They happened upon me and asked if I had seen an elf overhead riding on a black pegasus. I told them I had not, but that if I did I would let them know (though why I told them this I don't know: I have no way of contacting them, so it was an empty promise I suppose. It felt like the natural thing to say, though, so I said it). They rode on - and that's when I saw it.

From behind me appeared a serpent - not a snake, as we have in Arden, but a serpent. Serpents are different from snakes, in that a serpent possesses legs for walking (though they often use their bat-like wings to fly from one place to another), arms for using tools and weapons, and speak with clever tongues. As he glared at me with an intimidating gaze, I was frozen stiff.

He began to speak to me, asking me where I was from, what my errand was for the king, and where I was going. I stammered that I was not on an errand for the king, and that I was traveling across The Wilds to visit with friends of the kingdom in the Greater Wood. He eyed me over, fingered the cutlass that was at his side, and pulled himself to his full height (which was about four feet tall - pretty standard height for a serpent) before addressing me.

"I shall not be swayed so easily, human," he said to me, drawing out the "S" in each word as he spoke. "I seek a courier - a very special courier - and cannot afford to let you slip past me." As he said this he drew his sword, and I stumbled backward in fear, falling to the ground.

As he towered over me he said with a hungry look, "I suspect you're a spy," and he raised his blade, the sun glinting off its edge.

Just then an arrow shot through the air, hitting the serpent in the shoulder. He stumbled back, clearly angered by the shot, but with a snarl he took to the air, flying for a small grove in the distance.

I turned and saw one of the huntresses cantering over to me. As I lay there in the grass, still shocked by what I had seen, she dismounted and extended a hand to me to help me to my feet. She smiled a cocky smile and jested as she pulled me to my feet, "not much courage for being a man, huh?"

I didn't argue.

She punched my shoulder and said, "Take care to keep your wits about you from now on," as she mounted her horse, "as I may not be around to protect you forever."

I thanked her for aiding me, and she added, "If you're headed to the Greater Wood, our camp is moving in that direction. If you would like to accompany us, I can ask our Sister Guide on your behalf."

And so I find myself this morning setting out from an Amazon camp, heading north toward who knows what. They are assigning one of their guides to help me find the road again - Kyniga, the girl who shot the serpent - so we will be setting out this morning. More on the Amazon camp tomorrow: Kyniga is threatening to leave without me!

A.W.

Day 6

Dear Reader,

My apologies for the abbreviation of my story: when you travel alone you set your own schedule, giving ample time for writing and contemplation. But traveling with someone else (especially a trained huntress from a nomadic tribe) means my schedule is governed by someone else, so I find myself writing to you by firelight tonight as I take first watch over the camp.

The Amazons of Janys are a fascinating people. Like all Wild Men tribes they are a strong and powerful people, dangerous in combat and trained for war. They are simply clad, wearing the hides of the creatures they kill. I have seen no metal armor (which is quite common among our soldiers in Arden); they use metal solely for weapons.

I gather that is not true of other Wild Man tribes; the nearby town of Domar, apparently, has many heavily armored knights and berserkers - fearsome warriors that legends say feel no pain.

The Janys are nomads, living off the land and earning their meat through elaborate strategies when hunting. It is not enough for them to bring down a beast: there is an excellence expected by their people, governing how they chase it, bring it down, and use it afterwards.

¹ I would later learn on my return journey that when meeting a guest they don't care as much about where you live now so much as where you were born. It's quite interesting, really: they suspect that you can tell more about a

I am fascinated by this desire for excellence. They use the whole creature: meat for food, hide for leather, organs for satchels, and bones for tools, jewelry, and weapons. When they are done almost nothing remains, and Kyniga tells me that the best huntresses leave so little behind that even the vultures don't descend come the morning.

They are fierce and proud, but don't let that fool you. They are also a very giving people, as I learned upon entering their camp.

I was brought before their queen, a regal woman (probably in her thirties or forties; I'm not good at guessing these things!), who asked me my name and place of birth.¹ After hearing that I was a pilgrim with no means to repay them, the queen told me to think nothing of it, and that they would fill my satchel with provisions for my journey.

I...still don't know why they did it. But I am thankful for that. They have scratched out a living amidst the dangers of The Wilds with no walls or industry to protect them, and yet here they were, giving liberally to me, a complete stranger. I shall remember this kindness always.

A.W.

P.S. I shortened it my signature in my last entry for the sake of brevity, but honestly what do you think: do you like it? I rather like it myself, so I may keep it.

person from where they started than where they are. This has given me pause when interacting with other cultures who asked me where I was born.

Day 9

Day 10

Dear Reader,

Kyniga teaches me much about hunting and tracking, though I confess I lack natural skill in these areas. What takes me hours takes her a fraction of the time, and I feel embarrassed about how dense I must seem. She laughs when I bring it up, telling me, "You must learn these things if you are to survive: I cannot travel with you forever."

We can see the Greater Wood now. Thanks to the horses supplied to us by the queen, they have carried us to the last hill before the eaves of the forest. I have heard stories of this forest before: its branches shelter a host of dangerous creatures, and within its reaches lie many of the strongest kings in the world. Kirvin of the Leafwalker Elves dwells there, as does Filian of The Glade and Lohei of the Haloye wulvern clan.

I confess that I am scared to enter the forest. Even though Filian is only a day or two's journey into the forest, there is much that can happen to a person in a day or two. And this journey I will be making alone.

I have always wanted to see this place since my youth, and now that I am on the verge of entering it I am fearful that I may never return home. But those worries will be dealt with tomorrow: Kyniga is calling me over to help her with a brace of rabbits she caught today. Which reminds me: I need to learn how to set a snare trap tomorrow before she leaves.

A. W.

Dear Reader,

I am preparing to step into the Greater Wood even now. We have come to the edge of the forest, and are preparing to enter. I say "we" because Kyniga informed me this morning as she was making breakfast that she is planning to come with me into the forest. She says she will see me safely to The Glade, and once I am under the protection of the centaurs that she will depart.

This is good news for me, as I still have much to learn from her. She is eying me now to put my pen down and come into the forest, so I will have to leave. I hope to pick up my pen tomorrow morning,

A. W.

Day 11

Dear Reader,

We made camp yesterday in an old abandoned tree. It was dry, and large enough for both of us to both stand and sprawl out across its large interior. And last night we discovered that we are not the only ones to have made this discovery.

As we were preparing dinner Kyniga suddenly started, grabbed her bow and knives, and darted behind a rock. I looked around bewildered, and then I heard the heavy crunch of feet nearby. Too late to dash for cover from the fireplace, I ran into the tree trunk, which afforded little cover from view.

The creature approached, and then I saw, towering over eight feet tall, the knotted and ugly figure of a troll, whose attention was drawn to the coals of our fire. As he came over he let out a rumbling growl, as he placed his large, knobby foot on our fire, putting it out with a hiss.

He turned to look at me square in the eyes, and as I saw him, I suddenly felt small (which is not common for me, as I'm almost six feet tall, and am on the taller side of my people). He looked at me and began to speak in a rumbling, cracked language.

While I don't speak troll fluently I'd read about their language in a book once, and discerned from my limited memory that he was not pleased to see me, and seemed to think that the tree was his home (or "father" possibly: the words in troll are very close, and I couldn't hear the ending of the word properly due to fright).²

I saw Kyniga notching an arrow and preparing to fire, but I signaled her to not shoot (as I was unsure that her arrows would pierce his hide at all). I spoke to him in broken Trollfen, and discerned quickly that while he did not speak Basic he could understand it.³ After much deliberation with him, I convinced him that we would be more than glad to share our meat with him in exchange for shelter for the evening.

As we prepare to approach The Glade, I'm glad that we were able to avoid fighting yesterday. Not because I am opposed to violence, but because it allowed me to learn an important truth: I do have skills that are useful in the wilderness. And I hope they will come in handy again in the future.

We will travel for the rest of the day, and then we will be at the edges of The Glade. I look forward to writing to you how it goes!

A. W.

² And truth be told, I didn't much care at the time as to the proper translation: I was more worried about the large, burly arms and body of the troll that stood angrily above me. But looking back on it now, I'd wager my initial translation was indeed correct. Either that, or I have stumbled quite unknowingly on a great secret about the trolls, though I find that dubious.

³ As it turns out, this is not uncommon among the trolls. The throat and lips of trolls are not well designed for the proper pronunciation of Basic words, so while some of them do speak to the language, it is common to find trolls who have learned the language for the sake of understanding, but choose to speak only their native dialect aloud.

SECTION II: THE GLADE (CENTAURS, WULVERNS)

Day 12

Dear Reader,

Some men get to live out their dreams. Today, I was one of those men. As we entered The Glade we were greeted by a small troop of sentinels, who asked us where we were going and who we came to see. What struck me most about the sentinels, though, is how they approached us: they did not draw weapons (though they each had a very large spear and shield on their backs), and they did not speak with gruff voices.

They almost seemed to enjoy riding up to us. While their voices were deep and strong (as is typical of centaurs), they were very laid back and open as they spoke to us, which is radically different from guards in Arden. When they heard we were here to pay our respects from the Kingdom of Arden, they ushered us into the glen that they call home.

It's a fascinating place: all around the edges of the glen are a series of mounds, each of which sports a cross of white wood. As we entered we saw a mound opened (they had an earth mage on-hand who apparently uses the *Door in the Mountain* spell to open the grave, then turns off the spell to close it over the dead), and a clan was mourning over the body as it was interred.

He was an old centaur: his skin was haggard, he had many circles around his eyes, but his beard (which extended halfway down his torso) was the most vibrant white I've ever seen. As they laid him in the ground we heard one of the presiding augurs (for that is how they refer to the priests of their culture) pronounce a final blessing over the body, ending in their traditional blessing for the dead, "Rest in peace."

I've never heard this phrase before; apparently it's unique to the centaurs. They say that they have used this over the dead since as far back as anyone can remember, but no one remembers its origin.

As we entered some of the centaurs began to look at us. We saw a number of warriors, craftsmen, and townsfolk pass by as they trotted to their daily duties, all nodding as they passed. When we came to a large pavilion near the center of the camp, a large, hulking centaur stepped out of the pavilion.

I had heard tales of the square-jawed Filian: how he came from a no-name clan, and rose to prominence as their king after he slew a dragon with his bare hands. And from what we could tell, the stories are true.

When he came to meet us, he was unarmed and wore no armor. It was odd: no fine robes or formal armor, no entourage, no herald. He just came out to meet us. It is very odd, but striking in its own way.

If you ever have a chance to travel to The Glade, make a point to meet him. Just mind your manners, jest with him if he initiates, and allow him to speak. It may take a

while (as he likes to ponder), but let him speak. You will not regret it: he is a very wise and yet very practical fellow. I quite enjoyed our meeting.

Tomorrow they plan to show us the surrounding wood, take us on a hunt (as Kyniga was very interested to see how they hunt), and take us around the town. I can't wait.

A.W.

Dear Reader,

We are leaving The Glade soon: Kyniga has really enjoyed her stay among the centaurs, and is curious as to what lies deeper in the woods. I am not ready to return home yet, so I mentioned that I'm planning on heading to the Woodland Kingdom to see its king, Kirvin of the Leafwalkers. She agreed to accompany me on the journey, and I'm glad to have another set of eyes as we travel.

Yesterday was a whirlwind of excitement. We set out in the morning with a small band led by a large centaur named Marvel, who took us deep into the forest in search of bears (apparently centaurs love bear. It is considered a delicacy, along with salamander and manticore; would not have guessed that). It took the scouts about an hour to find the trail of the bears, but after picking up on it, we quickly found what we were looking for.

And then some.

We stumbled across a large gathering of bears, all fighting for the honor of being the consort of the Ursa Matriarch, a massive bear standing over fourteen feet tall when on her hind legs, and there she lay, lazily soaking up the sun as the other bears fought madly for her attention.

I confess, I shrunk in fear: it was such a large gathering of bears, but the small band of five centaurs seemed to revel in it, rushing headlong into the clearing. Centaurs are wild at heart and fear little, which is not always the best trait in a person.

Kyniga seemed to enjoy it too, maintaining her place on the back of one of the centaurs, arrow notched. As they flung themselves toward the bears, the beasts near the periphery saw them and turned to fight, while those near the matriarch continued in their futile suits. The fighting was fierce, and more than once I saw a centaur get smacked soundly over the head, toppling to the ground.

One of the centaurs, though, was a remarkable healer (Neven, I believe her name was) and stood behind the others to patch their wounds revive them with her magic. She seemed to fly across the battlefield, such was her speed and grace.

The matriarch saw what was happening and roared above the others with a deafening cry. I was afraid that my ears would burst from the violent shock. She charged Marvel and bowled into him full force. He returned the favor by swinging his axe mightily into her shoulder as she collided with him, tearing a large gash in her hide as he went flying across the forest floor. She roared (in victory or in pain I'll never know), and turned to leave.

The other bears began following after her, and we stayed behind to lick our wounds and tend to those who had been torn and wounded by the onslaught. Three bears lay dead on the floor, others badly wounded but limping off to join the others.

As we came back to camp the augurs took in the hunters for another inspection of their wounds, and Kyniga and I went to the stream to fish before dinner. I was pleased to find that my lessons in fishing growing up paid off: I caught three fish, which was just as many as

Kyniga. She was impressed, and so was I: I have another useful skill here in the Wilds!

Tomorrow we set out for the Woodland Kingdom. These folk are rough to be sure, but they are such fine fellows and lasses to share a day or two with. I shall miss them.

A. W.

P.S. - I love this "fellow" and "lass" thing that they use here to refer to males and females. I may add it to my standard vocabulary, as it seems more sophisticated.

Day 15

Dear Reader,

We spent today walking through the wulvern camp near *The Glade*. The wulvern tribe of maybe a hundred persons used to be a strong clan - never large, but strong. The Vargi, as they call themselves, are typical in size and build for wulverns: about four feet tall when on all fours, and about six feet tall when standing tall. They are capable archers, often armed with knives and crossbows, and they are rough but jovial friends.

I spoke with one of their shamans, a sage wulvern of over three hundred years who relayed to us the sad fate of his clan. Clan wars among wulverns (and all races, I suppose), happen from time to time, and in this case the Vargi lost. They were beset by the largest of the wulvern tribes, the Haloye, a tribe that is known for its brutality and pride. When they attack, they insure that a lost battle is engraved in the memories of their enemies.

For the Vargi, it meant almost complete extermination. Hundreds fell, only a handful survived. Those who did fled to their current home, seeking shelter from their allies in *The Glade*. The king granted them a blood pact of protection, as they have for many wulvern clans over the years. All except one: the Haloye clan.

Wulverns are fascinating creatures: they can walk on all fours, gaining added speed and agility (not to mention stealth), but stand on their hind legs when preparing for combat. Their front paws are fingered with opposing

thumbs, capable of using powerful weapons and skilled in the use of tools and other implements of craftsmanship.

They tend to joke like the centaurs as well: punches to the arms, clapping on the back, and they laugh from the gut: a very deep howl. Unlike the centaurs, the Vargi have a cutting wit, making quick jabs in conversation coupled with a biting sarcasm. It has proven to be particularly effective against disgruntled centaurs, who are easy to spark when they are troubled.

I wish I could stay longer: I have so much that I wish I could learn from these people.

A. W.

Day 17

Dear Reader,

A massive storm suddenly came upon us this afternoon after we set out from The Glade, and as we are now stuck under the thick eaves of a tamar tree, she asked me to tell her more about the centaurs and their ways.

We chatted for most of the afternoon, and reflecting on my day, I thought I would relay some of its contents to you, our dear reader. Who knows: it may prove helpful to you should you ever run into a centaur.

First, centaurs are always ready for a good fight (especially a fight where the outcome is dubious). This lends them well to their neighbors, as it usually means that if you are being invaded and ask them for aid, they are not a people that likes to shy away from combat.

Centaurs are strong and honorable (in their own way: they can be rather coarse at times, but when they give their word they stick to it, even if their word is a blood oath), but they also love to jest. Their jesting often involves physical contact (usually a jab or punch to the arm or shoulder, a clap on the back - if a man takes care to wear good torso armor, he will find they are actually quite harmless in their jesting), raucous behavior, loud bellowing, and other traditionally uncouth actions.⁴

⁴ To not jest is to insult a centaur – do not do this. To jest outside of this form would be lost on them and may be taken as an insult – do not do this. In what may be the only such entry in this journal, I am recommending that you embrace your inner base instincts (mercy upon you should you have them) and

Centaurs are also extremely strong. Imagine the power of a draft horse encapsulated in an arm that can wield an axe, spear, or sword. When roused they are deadly opponents, so be mindful.

Centaurs also have a closeness (some would say a bond) to the stars. They consult the stars for everything (even during the day they seem to be able to glimpse their movements in the heavens), and while not fatalists, they believe that the stars never lie, so they rely on them for many decisions. If you disagree...keep it to yourself.

We should be able to reach the Woodland Kingdom within the next day or two; I hope to write again soon,

A.W.

play along. Don't hold back: they will judge you on your first impression, namely in how hard you hit them in the arm, shoulder, or back. Believe it or not, it will make friends for you even if it should go very poorly for you.

SECTION III: THE WOODLAND KINGDOM (WOOD ELVES)

Day 19

Dear Reader,

We met the Leafwalker Elves today, in an experience I shall not easily forget. Kyniga and I were riding along the rough path that the centaurs showed us, when they ambushed us. Kyniga appeared to expect their presence, as she had drawn a knife before they leapt from their hiding place (how does she hear them through the other sounds around us in the forest? I still can't fathom that).

They told us that Kirvin (their king) holds court in the city of Oakbrook, which we could reach in about two days. They took us instead to their town, a small yet well-fortified town named Cael.

Leafwalker towns fascinate me. They are natural, usually constructed of rope bridges connecting platforms in the trees, keeping everything of importance off the ground (and thus safe from some of the natural predators of the forest). Their architecture is relatively simple, but incredibly durable. Everything is built for utility over aesthetics, though the rustic aesthetic that it conveys is pleasing to me.

The floating parapets are truly incredible. They let me embark on one near the marketplace of Cael. One moment you think you're on a walled jetty set in the air above the forest floor, and the next thing you know the parapet is floating toward the next tree, moving as if directed by the mind of the elf that is leading you through the town. It is truly incredible: an excellent use of magic, and a very efficient means of travel above the forest floor.

They are excellent hunters, woodsmen, and foresters, and children are expected to bring down their first buck or doe by the age of eight. Their senses are more acute than the others of their kin, and they are excellent guides through dark, dangerous places.⁵

They also dress very simply. While I saw some guards in heavy armor, most of the townsfolk dress in cloth and leather, with cloaks and weapons being present on everyone almost all the time. I gather that attacks are quite common around here, as Cael is located on the frontier of their territory.

The preferred mounts of the Leafwalkers (as they are often called by our people) are stags, hippogryphs, and great eagles. Most Leafwalkers would prefer to walk on foot, and have developed shoes and cloaks that help them move quickly and silently under the eaves. So as you approach a wood elf town, make sure to look as harmless as possible: they are likely watching your approach.

⁵ In truth, I would later learn that the Dark Elves contest this claim; they believe that they are the equals, if not superiors, among their race in this regard. I have seen the fearsome power of a dark elf squadron: they are fast,

precise, and very spatially aware. Seeing as I lack the prowess to contest with either party, I hold my own judgment. I recommend the same of you.

I asked Kyniga if we could explore town tomorrow, and she agreed that we could take some time to see the place. I will write again soon, though I don't know when that will be.

A. W.

Dear Reader,

Wow, Oakbrook is an incredible city. Unlike the other towns of the Leafwalkers there is a sizable amount of infrastructure on the ground, including a massive tower that is really just an oak tree that has been hollowed and carefully chiseled to form a beautiful staircase heading toward the upper branches. This serves as the keep for the city, and it is massive - easily a dozen ogres wide.

The sages tell me that many a Life Growth spell has been used on this tree to keep it growing and in full bloom over the centuries. The result is been a massive tree that, even though it has been chiseled into a veritable fortress of parapets, crenellations, and defensive wards, is still a healthy, vibrant tree. And apparently still growing!

The elves themselves are much like the tree: rustic, simply clad, but resilient. They are cautious, guarded in nuance and situational awareness, so as not to be taken off-guard. They are excellent scouts, boasting the keen eyes and sharp hearing of the Firstborn.

I love watching them walk: their steps are so light. Combine that with the leather sandals they wear, and you will be hard-pressed to hear them as they stalk their prey and patrol their realm.

Oh: off to the feast. Kirvin and his court will be hosting us for a banquet, and I do not wish to be late!

A. W.

Day 22

Dear Reader,

The feast last night was incredible: roasted pork, greener greens than I have ever seen, and a special lily whose nectar was truly spectacular. I almost thought I had tasted the magical realm as it touched my lips. You should try it if you're ever in town, though I imagine it will be expensive.

The Woodland Kingdom is an interesting place: they are ruled by their stalwart and strong king, Kirvin. He hails from a long line of warrior kings, all of whom were forced to fight to maintain their people's realm.

They are good friends with Filian, and have worked with many other allies. Various peoples, including our Kingdom of Arden, the Enclave of the Eldar Elves, the Faun Federation, the Men of the Wild, and others have failed him over the years in his time of need.

Because of this Kirvin is suspicious of all who enter his seat of court, and I confess: I felt embarrassed for my kin as we appeared before him. Kirvin appears above all things to desire honesty and trust. Living in The Greater Wood means constant fear of invasion and danger, and centuries of leadership have made him hard.

I confess I feel for him: how hard it must have been to watch other kings rise, bring the hope of being a trusted ally, and then fade as another succeeded them, doomed perhaps to repeat the same fate. Such is the curse of living as long as the elves do.

But if there is one thing that stood out above the rest at the feast was Kirvin's daughter and only child: Slenesta. She came out wearing a green raiment, tied with a golden cord at the waist, sporting no ornament save a long, thin knife. Her hair fell in gold tresses to her shoulders, and she was truly beautiful to behold. I turned to the elf near me to ask who she was, and he explained that she is the fairest dame in the whole kingdom.

We will be taken tomorrow on a hunt: apparently there is a Red Stag in the area, and a number of Kirvin's warriors will be going out in search of it. I look forward to the journey: it will be my first journey on a hippogryph!

A.W.