

See the Dragon Emperor

(*Capel*) After three years of seclusion, the Dragon Emperor Dracar has begun to travel, paying diplomatic visits to allies and enemies alike.

In a gesture of peace, the Emperor does not travel protected by his legions, but with a small contingent of guards and other diplomats.

In addition to his Queen Arquena

and his sons Keryn and Lordus, the Emperor has brought Penbeck, elf-mage and friend. Another companion is the Iluwin envoy from Skyreach, Illaria, a noble lady in those lands. Observing the trip is the Voden Speaker Zacharias. Leading the small contingent of Imperial Guards is Sarinus Taltos.

Official proclamations state that the Emperor seeks peace with his neighbors and wishes to assure them that he has no territorial ambitions.

But he will also discuss the recent Skoryn invasions of Capellan land and seek to halt any further expansion by his recent ally, King Grifone.

NOT ALL DWARVES THE SAME

(*Tsen Tyrol, Nore*) -- After centuries of scarcity, the dwarves have re-emerged in Esterra, first as loyal allies in the Riven Wars and now as trading partners and citizens. Tsen Tyrol itself boasts no fewer than five dwarven craftsmen working within its walls.

But are the dwarves, or Durin as they call themselves, as homogenous as they seem to be? Its quite hard to tell when even their women have beards.

The Durin come from many different "Homes" and each lends a unique character to the dwarves who hail from it.

Closest to Nore is the Durin home of Durun Baldesi. Baldesi lies beneath the great Strathruyl mountains in the west. The dwarves of Baldesi are aloof, but friendly once you've gained their trust. They have great capacity to endure hardship. On many occasions they have joined in fights against evil. Who can forget the dwarven shield wall that saved heroes of Capel?

But these same dwarves also trade with the Skoryn, providing them with superior weapons and armor. Are the Durin neutral as they claim or are they truly aiding Skoryn's ambitions to rule all of Esterra?

CRYSTAL SHRINE RISES

(*Lake Tortal, Nore*) -- One moment all was peaceful on the shores of this high mountain lake. The next, the sun went black and the lake trembled. The Crystal Shrine of Helena rose from the waters like a long-slumbering beast now awakened.

The Shrine now stands on an island in the center of the Lake. Priests of Helena have come from all parts of Esterra, drawn by its power. They live in makeshift houses on the shores of the island as they seek to unlock the secrets of the Shrine and determine Helena's will.

Norish folk in the region are nervous at this new power in their midst and are fearful of what may come next. Already, the influence of the Shrine has brought out avarice and hedonism in local villagers.

Some villagers dismiss such claims as idle fantasies and celebrate the wealth and trade that the Shrine is bringing into their valley.

VURDIGAN EMPEROR SLAIN

(*Vurdiga*) -- The Vurdigan-Grothan war has taken a turn for the worse. In a fierce battle near Corfa, Emperor Baschelm was slain by the poisoned arrows of the enemy.

The Grotha, or "orcs" as rural folk call them, surged out of the Baselgrem Mountains the summer after the rise of the Dragon Throne. What had been seen as an occasional nuisance was now a dire threat to the Vurdigan people.

Ancient animosities between the Vurdigan men and the tribes of Esterra came to the fore that year as no assistance was offered from the West. The Dragon Throne had no armies to lend and the other states were embroiled in their own wars and fears, either with the Skoryn or the Dragon Throne itself.

With the Emperor slain, the high city of Corfa has likely fallen. The always tenuous unity of the Vurdigan tribes will likely shatter as they withdraw to protect their individual homelands and barbaric ways of life.

The Lands of Vurdiga will see their Orb of Kings held in an orcish fist.

ANDUNE SMITHSTONE FOUND

(*Durun Rista, Skyreach*) -- The halls of Durun Rista ring with celebration. This dwarven home in the Baselgrem Mountains by the Skyreach Forest triumphantly declares that an ancient Durin relic has been found and returned to them.

Andune was the master Durin smith who in ancient days forged the crown of the Skyreach Elven King, the Shackles of the Titans, the Hammer of Frong who slew the monster Zoanaster from Beyond the Pits, the Seven Swords of the Voden, the Goblet of Gilth, the Helms of the Dwarflords, the Sword of Amon, and the Doomhammer.

In the centuries after his death, the relics of his forge were slowly lost to war, disaster, theft, and treachery until none remained in Durin hands.

Now the first piece of these relics, collectively known as the Forge of Andune, has been discovered and returned to the Rista dwarves.

Gorlaun, King under the Mountain, declared that his people would recover all of Andune's relics and once again, dwarvish works would reign supreme across the lands.

DOG WARRIORS ATTACK

(Pazi, Northern Nore) -- The town of Pazi has been abandoned after re-

peated attacks by "dog-men" drove back the soldiers of Baron Sperra.

The dog-men appeared from the eastern reaches of the Strathrhyll mountains in late summer. Their first raids were for food and were poorly organized. They had no weapons then.

But in the attack that took the town, these animals acted more like soldiers bearing weapons and armor and obeying orders of leaders.

Baron Sperra has demanded aid from the newly crowned King Tsen, but with similar dangers appearing across the country, Pazi will likely remain occupied for some time to come. The King has garrisoned most of the Norish army on the borders with Skoryn where they are building up fortifications.

NORE NO PARADISE FOR FAITHFUL

(Thran) -- High priests and guiding mothers of the Seven Elders thought they had found a peaceful sanctuary

in the lands of Nore.

But even the devout King Tsen could not protect them from intra-faith clashes and the dangers of this "New Age".

As summer turned to fall, their new temple in Tsen Tyrol was sacked by a dark sorcerer and their faithful have suffered from the evils that walk the land.

Priests of the Seven Elders are working within their ranks to settle rivalries and animosities unleashed in their flight from Capel. They are also working with King Tsen to alleviate the suffering of the Norish people as well as the Capellan refugees.

The Shrine of All Gods in Tsen Tyrol is being repaired, though the relics which weren't destroyed are being taken to secret locations to safeguard them.

The priests have also called on all good people to fight the evils of this New Age and have pledged their support for any hurt in the cause of good.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

Bounties Raised!!! : The King of Nore has raised the bounties on monsters. Males are still worth twice a female and ten times a youngling. But the base has been doubled.

For Warrior Males : Grothans (orcs) are worth ten gold crowns. Dogmen are worth twenty gold crowns. Runts and Goblins are worth five gold crowns. Trolls and Ogres are worth fifty gold crowns.

Gray Wizards Accepting Students

: Those who pass a rigorous test may be admitted for training in the arcane arts by the Gray Wizards (recently members of the Arcanum in Ramal). Vast powers can be yours to slay monsters, aid the helpless, save the taken, or serve the good of Nore.

Student must follow a strict regimen and the Magehold requires oaths

of fealty of its students.

Red Birds Return: Not all are gone. Gather with the COPPERSMITHS and we shall fly again.

Tanners Guild Meeting: After the tragic events of the last Tanners Guild Meeting, our next meeting will forbid members to carry weapons. The Pieces of the Guild's Book of Measures and Values have been recovered and painstakingly reassembled.

With the death of two candidates, the new Guildmaster Election will be between Contarius and Villem de Ours, held on the next Holy Day. Further tampering with the Guild's master set of weights and measures will result in the expulsion of the culprit and a ban on their practice of our most noble craft.

Far Merchant's Guild Calls for Caravaneers: After decades of peaceful commerce, hauling trade goods has become a dangerous proposition in Capel, Nore, and Venar.

GOOD PAY is being offered to veteran fighters to sign on as caravaneers. Those who step forward will now be admitted as full members of the Far Merchant's Guild at the end of their third successful trip.

Calling All Smiths: Put your hammer in use for defense of the Kingdom. The Armies of King Tsen of Nore are growing to deal with the dangers of the New Age. They need the finest weapons and armor to complete their tasks. Apply at the Metalliers Guildhall for Army work. Pay is DOUBLE GUILD FEES.

THE TRAVEL PAGES

By Gipper Wisefoot

“Visiting the Heart of the Empire”

My travels have taken me far and wide since we last spoke. This evening I take my rest in the **Inn of the Blind Soldier** in **Matlothian**, capital of **Venar**.

Venar is a wonderful land, bountiful in its crops and crafts, dominated by rolling hills and the great river **Viskigard**. Any **Hin** would feel at home in Venar.

The land is ruled by **Queen Selay** and justice delivered by her **Heralds**. Heralds are judges, scouts, and defenders. Though they number less than fifty all together, the Heralds uphold the Queen’s justice and bind the country together.

Heralds ride remarkable beasts called **Companions**, though I’ve been warned not to call them beasts. It is said that they are as smart as a man, though that, of course, is not saying much. All I know is that Companions look like fine horses of purest white with blue eyes.

Becoming a Herald is quite a trial. First you must train to learn their skills, martial, judicial, and diplomatic. Then, once trained, you must hope that a Companion “chooses” you. It is this **Rite of Choice** that appears to cull all but the most selfless and dutiful out of the running. Those who are chosen become Heralds and wear their white uniform.

Surprisingly, only a Herald may become the monarch of Venar, ensuring fairly good leadership dedicated to the good of the people. And I think we’ve all seen far too little of that in the other realms of Esterra.

Venar can be divided into several regions.

Pestia is also known as the **Western Shores**. They stretch along the coast from **Ghillea** to **Edo-azani** and some way inland. They bring riches of trade and harvests of the sea.

Troubles include pirate raiders, slavers, and criminal gangs in its many cities. Recently, a **Frendi Trading House** was founded there. The regional ruler is **Lord Orthallen**.

Ghillea (or **the Fronter**) lies in the northwest of Venar, stretching through deep forests around the feet of the **Baselgrem Mountains**. It is a frontier area where the soldiers of Venar strive to protect the border and keep various monstrous tribes from reaching the gentle heartland of the country. Ghillea is ruled by **Lord General Gartheser**.

Ruthven (or **the Northern Forests**) lies east of Ghillea, north of the heart of the country, all the way to the **Edo-basal** (or the **Eastern Hills**). Ruthven is a heavily wooded land which suffered greatly from both invasions of the foul **Riven**. Strong spirits dwell in its forests and hold back monsters who would pillage from the mountains. The land is ruled by the **Mage Vismeth** though it is in partnership with the **Druid of Ruthven**.

Venaria (or **the Middle Riverlands**) is the heart of the country, a land of farms, herds, and rolling hills. The **Viskigard** runs through its center on its way from **Edo-basal** to **Pestia**. The capital, **Matlothian**, lies along the river in the center of Venaria. Outside of the **Royal Lands**, **Lady Kester** rules the region.

Edo-basal (or **the Eastern Hills**) lies along the foothills of the cloud-reaching **Basalgrem Mountains**. Not a populous area, it is a source of much mineral wealth. Venar soldiers are garrisoned here to protect the smithies in **Govren** and the mines in the hills. The region is ruled by **Lady Wyryst**.

Edo-azani (or **the Southwest**) is a small region of Venar but a turbulent one. It was in **Edo-azani** that the

Skoryn invaders were brought to a halt. **Azani** refugees fleeing the invasion 200 years ago settled in **Edo-azani** and their culture can be seen in the food, buildings, clothes, and speech. The region is known for its craftsmen and strong **Guilds**. It is ruled by **Guildmistress Myrim**.

Edo-stera (or **the Southeast**) is the last region and the least interesting. While it holds the **Southern Road** to **Nore** within it, little else occurs there. Farming is no match for Venaria so they rely on trade with **Nore** and **Thran**. Trade further than that is usually sent by ship. Ruler of the region is **Lord Gildas**.

I have found the most interesting place is the capital, **Matlothian**. You can tell the age of the city from the succession of city walls that it has overgrown. Counting the walls of the Royal grounds there are three!

The city is crowded and lively, with plenty of trade on the river or from the **Southern Road**.

It is within the **Royal Lands** that the true jewels of Venar are kept. Within the grounds with the **Palace** is the **Collegium**, a complex of fortified buildings created to train future Heralds, Bards, Healers, and Artificers.

Heralds, as I’ve said before, are the **Long Arm of the Law** and the **Queen’s Will**. They wear white uniforms on duty and those who train to become Heralds wear grey.

Healers are those granted by the earth-mother with gifts at healing the sick or injured. Master Healers wear deep green robes, while their students wear pale green.

Bards entertain and rouse the spirit of the people, garbed in scarlet. Their students wear red-brown.

And the **Artificers** are the builders, masters of bridge, pulleys, levers, and wheels. Masters wear blue, apprentices pale blue.