

Asheraven Play Report #3

Good morning, and welcome to the third release in the Asheraven Play Report. The effort continues in bringing events from my campaign in Asheraven up to the present, and this report also marks the end of the handwritten releases. These first three releases will receive proper write-ups in the near future, and future write-ups will be typed from the start.

At the end of the last report, the party was in position to distract the guards and others inside the compound where Aldo gets the ingredients for his restaurant. Aileen set the grapple hook in the wall with a dangling rope to climb up, and Figlar prepared a candle bomb with a candle and an oil flask. Vlad and Laurina waited by the rope. Aileen signaled to Figlar, who lit the candle and made his way to the others, using the forest around the compound as cover. The candle burnt down and ignited the oil in its glass flask, which began a sizeable fire at the edge of the forest. As predicted, the guards called for the others to help defend from the perceived attack. The PCs - Stinky and Gingledoof were left back in Narwell - scaled the wall with the help of the rope and grapple and began searching the compound. All of the guards and even the driver for the delivery cart were seen first preparing for combat and then scrambling to ferry water between each other to put out the growing flame.

Vlad and Figlar went to the smaller of the two buildings in the compound. They found its door unlocked but heard a great commotion of movement inside. Gaining surprise in the ensuing encounter, Vlad swiftly entered through the door, located the unsuspecting man within the building, and knocked him out with the blunt

face of his battle axe. The man appeared similar to Aldo but with a slightly more muscled appearance. Vlad and Figlar searched the room, turning up some coins, a document that appeared to be a contract written in an unknown language, and the identity of the man Vlad put to sleep - Butcher, Aldo's brother.

Aileen and Laurana entered the larger building but were not there for long. The interior was dark with no torches, lanterns, or windows. Both characters had infravision, and so saw a few masses of heat farther into the building. Each mass appeared to be made up of multiple monsters in groups, but it was clear that these creatures were about the size and shape of a small bear, like a black bear. The creatures appeared to notice the two women's arrival, and began scurrying toward them, creating a cacophany of scraping sound of claws on stone. The pair exited the building once that began, and the creatures inside did not attempt to follow them out. They met up with Vlad and Figlar and made their way back to their rope to leave the compound. They did so, taking their rope and hook with them, and waited for the compound's guards to extinguish the fire set earlier. Then, they returned to Narwell the way they came.

Two questions weighed on the party at this point:

1. What was written on the document?
2. Why were Narwellian guards at the compound?

The party planned to speak with the captain of the guard, Sergeant Renault (his title is technically Captain, but he prefers the sound of his lesser title, Sergeant. He's well respected and admired by nearly all in Narwell, so his preference is obliged), about the second question. For the first, they were looking for a linguist. There was a well-known scholar in Narwell named Terrance who, if not able to read the document himself, likely knew

someone who did. The first thing they actually did, though, was return to Domino and told him everything they've learned so far. He was unconcerned with the presence of Marvellian guards beyond amusement, and he reminded the players, "learning the secret behind the steaks is the task. Everything else is secondary. That document seems most important right now besides whatever was within the larger building".

Still, the party sought Renault first, since he was closer. They asked him if he has had an issue with guards being absent from their assigned post, and Renault said he had not, except for rare occasions that were cleared up around the time of incident. The party told him that they had seen otherwise and filled him in about what they'd seen at the compound (but only the information about the guards). Without the identities of the guards there, Renault could not verify the information. Moreover, he could not be sure the PCs were being truthful at all, nor could he perform internal inquiry and risk anyone involved disrupting such action, if indeed the party was truthful and correct. He said he would consider the matter and would call on them if necessary. At that, the party visited Terrance, who lived in Marwell.

Terrance is an old, spectacled human man who specializes in non-magical fields of study, although he is known to have a small amount of experience with the arcane - enough to safeguard his home and library from would-be burglars. The other knowledge he has is not terribly expansive, but it has great depth. When the party arrives, he responds to their request of his presence by opening the front door just enough for the party to see just him and that the room behind him is in extreme disarray. He is respectful but inhospitable. He asks what they want and drums his fingers on the door impatiently. The party tells him about the document and

shows it to him. Terrance says that it is written in Dwarven script, but the language is something different - something he can't understand. He refers the party to another scholar named Fredenick, who lives an hour's walk southeast of Narwell in a stout tower. Fred seems to have knowledge of more esoteric and obscure subjects. Visiting Fredenick seems to be more fruitful to the party. The sage is more welcoming than his colleague, but, before he entertains the party's concerns, he insists on casting a spell and does so before gaining approval. This is generally a faux pas in Asheravian culture, casting a spell without obviously charitable or beneficial intentions. However, Fredenick lives outside of Narwell, and it is not uncommon for the etiquettes of polite society to be bent or broken when there is a lack of social consequence; in other words, since the party could very well have come to Fred's residence for malignant intent, he is socially justified in casting his spell before declaring his intent. In this case, a harmless shimmer washed over the PCs momentarily before dissolving, at which point Fredenick stated he was ensuring the party bore no grudge against him. At that, he allowed them inside his tower, which had three floors including the ground level.

Fredenick's space was as hospitable as he was. There was certainly no shortage of tomes, scrolls, or sheets of paper, parchment, or vellum, but these things, as well as other curiosities, were well-arranged around a comfortable sitting area which was joined right with a dining and cooking area. Fredenick allowed the party to take a seat while he set a kettle to boil. Finally, he asked the party what answers it was that they were seeking, for it was rare for strangers to visit him for leisure. They told him about their document written in Dwarven script but not in Dwarven language. This piqued his interest, and he said there

are many peoples who might use another's written or spoken words for their own, usually in drastically different contexts. He skimmed the sheet and said it appeared to be in the language of Giants, but that it was certainly not written by a giant. He would need several days to translate the document, which would include checking references, figures of speech, and double checking again against other sources. It would also not be cheap, costing twenty gold pieces per day. Frederick says, "Ordinarily, it'd be over one-hundred, but you have been well-mannered young folk thus far, which is as rare as a sober dwarf". The party, of course, attempts to negotiate the price down even further, but the sage does not budge, saying, "It is as steep a discount as I am willing to give strangers, and I am only content with such an arrangement due to the guarantee that you must visit for tea again to retrieve your translation. If you cannot pay, then we may find an alternative arrangement but not until that time comes to pass".

The party returned to Marwell, and the next day began with request for their presence by Sergeant Renault. He said that he had given their words some thought, and he believes he has come up with a way the party might help him investigate their claims. Actually, there were a few different ways. First, There was a vent that allowed air to be exchanged from the interior of the barracks with the outside; Figlar, being a gnome, would be more than able to access it discretely from the outside. Every six hours, the watch changes for half of the guard posts, so that each twelve hour period has a different set of guards than the previous twelve hours. When the change in watch occurs, each guard returns his tabard, and new guards come to pick theirs up. Really, it happens in reverse order, so the fresh tabards are given first and old ones returned second. If the party can identify the guards at Aldo's com-

pound and verify their identities at the barracks, then they can point those guards out to Renault, and more thorough methods can be employed to see what's going on. He does say that it is very unlikely that six guards are shirking their responsibilities. It is more likely that there are only a few bad apples in the force. This statement seemed to indicate to the party that they could also try to identify any guards who might be taking multiple tabs to give to guards at Aldo's compound who are not Marwellian guards.

While the party waited for Frederick to finish his work, they checked back in on Aldo's compound to see if the situation had changed at all. They saw that it had not, except that now four guards were outside the large entry door rather than two. On the way back, though, the party saw some armored warriors in the forest. The plumage on their helmets and crests on their shields—these were heavily-dad knights—indicated that they were Asheravian Knights, who served the King himself, King Belgam IV, Distinguished Hand of Amvian. What they might be doing in the forest was anyone's guess, but the PCs kept their distance and circumvented any chance of actually encountering the knights. Upon returning to Marwell, the party simply rests and waits for Frederick to send for them. Over these few days, quite a bit happens in the world around the party. First, a heavy storm moves in and passes, rendering any significant travel impossible, but it lifts after a few days, leaving behind dense fog. Somewhere within the fog, strange sounds of battle can be heard. Estimates say it is originating between one and three leagues away. The circus of Gandolfo also announced that they will put the show on earlier, in about three weeks, to coincide with Marwell's Harvest Festival. The caravan is slated to leave in eight weeks, which was when Gandolfo's circus was originally scheduled to begin. Perhaps the biggest news

carried on the voice of Morris, the town crier, was that a detachment of the King's army have not been seen since they were ordered to recapture the holding of an errant Lord Octavio. A reward of one-hundred gold pieces per knight is at hand for their safe return to Asheraven or one of its loyal satellites (Narwell would count as one of those places). The party did not seem to draw any connection between the knights they saw in the forest (in the same direction as the rebellious Lord's lands) and the knights reported missing. The PCs did receive a message from Frederick, so they paid him a visit. The document recovered from Aldo's was, in fact, written in Dwarven conveying the Giant language, and it was very clearly a trade agreement between a hill giant named Grubart, whose signature was a fingerpainted line, and the other, more traditionally signed Butcher Venhall, Aldo's brother. The terms of the agreement were ambiguous in all other respects, but one thing that was clear was that Aldo's cattle came from the giants.

That's the end of part three of the play report. As you can see, things are becoming very interesting with the steak situation. You will also likely be glad to hear that next week's report will be sent as actual typed text rather than this scribbled mess. As stated before, these handwritten reports will receive some typed attention as well, and I'll probably announce it in a future letter with links from each report to the preceding and preceding reports. God bless and enjoy the rest of your day.

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