

Asheraven Play Report #1

Good morning, everyone. Again, I am sending this letter in a different format. I have begun a "fast" of sorts, not in a sense of overcoming a hunger for food, but in denying myself unfettered access to the many portals to the online world in my life, at least for most of the day. What this means for this letter, and the two which follow, is that they shall be written by hand, scanned into an image, and uploaded to Substack. Once this fast is over, I will return to these letters and type them. The purpose of this exercise is to form a better set of habits and limits for myself going forward and also to keep the affairs of the digital world from plaguing my real, actual life with nonsense. I apologize in advance for the cursive which is my handwriting. I am fighting against at least eight years of a self-taught habit to make my script illegible to teachers who insisted on critiquing the words and information I'd use to take notes. Now, onto the report.

The party began with four player characters. Remember that, to begin with a hook into each other's lives, they are all, in some way, associated with the temple in Narwell, which is home to a clergy of men and women devoted to Amviar. Amviar is the deity followed by all civilized peoples, though individuals may certainly choose only to outwardly appear to be dedicated. If not following Amviar, those who make that choice follow Mizbal, which is both the same as, and inverse to, Amviar. The "holy texts" of the two are the same, but the interpretations are polar opposites. This is an important distinction, because, while someone who has the appearance of an Amviar devotee only might truly be a follower, someone in possession of texts, symbols, and icons of Mizbal is almost certainly aligned in that way; in shorthand, Amviar = good (generally), and Mizbal = bad/evil (with near certainty). With that impromptu explanation done, the PCs are

as followed:

- Zinra, half-elf cleric in the clergy of Amviar.
- Altor, human ranger - trapped and hunted animals by request of the temple as needed for rituals and ceremonies.
- Galdor, human paladin in the clergy of Amviar.
- Laurana, elf thief - inspected jewelry and gems sacred to the temple.

As with many campaigns throughout history, this one began in a tavern called Tavern of the Topsy Abbot, or Topsy's for short. It is a popular bar and restaurant for those who work with the temple and the townsfolk too. Aside from regulars and uninteresting people, the only notable client was a northman at the bar who, even as the party entered, clearly had had too much to drink. He was rambunctious in a jovial way, bragging loudly to anyone nearby that he awaits his handsomely-paid armed escort, at which time he will go to claim a once-forgotten castle and territory. The sheet of greatly-aged, but of very fine quality, parchment describes these properties as birthrights of his ancestors, and he also flaunts the sheet happily in his boasting. While most of the party entertains him with conversation, Altor buys a drink and returns outside the front of the tavern, where generally less-savory fellows flock to, which, tonight, includes an unwashed beggar that everyone calls Stinky on account of his hygienic state. Altor buys some refreshments for him as they converse about inconsequential matters. By the end of the night, the party inside has learned the general location of the northman's castle (a day or two's travel south), that his "paid escorts" scammed him of his money and aren't going to come, and that the northman overestimates his tolerance for alcohol as he passes out at the bar. Laurana, having no moral qualms towards stealing from the man, snatches up the document he had, which had fallen to the floor. The party, of course, decides to visit the castle, and Altor has even recruited

Stinky with the promise of endless treasure and, most importantly, luxurious comforts. Stinky begins as a normal man with a Loyalty score of 7 towards Altor.

The party, consisting of Zinra and her mule, Altor, Galdor, Laurana, and Stinky, marches south bound the following morning. No monsters are encountered on the journey, but the party encounters a precarious bridge crossing a river, which collapses after Zinra leads her mule across. The other party members fashion a raft from the broken bridge and ferry across the water. The terrain, which has been a forest of light density, becomes more dense and humid, but not hot, shortly after the bridge. The ground is damp and slightly squishy. They find, peeking out of the ground, a mossy construction of stone brick - about three feet wide, five feet long, and eight feet tall - with a door completely made of green-tarnished copper on the short side. The door has no handle, but the party accurately remembers the northman saying many times "the deed is the key! The deed is the key!", so they present the old parchment, and the door creaks and squeaks as it slowly swings outward. Cold, musty air spills from the cavity beyond, which has a downward-bound staircase immediately inside.

The party descends into room 1 of the Olde Island Fortress from Basic Fantasy's BF1 - Morgansfort module. The marching order is Galdor, Altor, Zinra, Stinky, Laurana. Although Zinra's mule could have accompanied them, she decided to stake it outside, hidden away. Zinra and Stinky each hold a torch. The party moves west, following the evident marks of traffic. The pit trap is not sprung, but the wolves in room 2 to the south growl as the party passes by. Because lights only illuminate up to ten feet

From the source, the party does not see how many wolves or exactly how large the room is. They decide to instead enter room 3 to the north. The party wins surprise against the stinges but squander the opportunity to attack them by inspecting the piles of dung below the nests. Combat ensues and resolves quickly with the party as victors, but they are badly hurt. What's more, they can hear the wolves moving around in the other room. Not wanting to leave empty-handed, the party fills sacks with the dung (and, thus, the treasures hidden therein) and exit the dungeon, again avoiding the effects of the pit trap. As they leave, they close the copper dungeon entrance and retrieve the mule. On the return journey, they discover that the river is shallow enough for the mule to cross, so Zinra crosses on her mule while the others use the raft again. Again, there are no encounters in the wilderness on the way to Marwell.

Upon entering the town, the party spotted the northman on display in the public square in the stocks for punishment. The party went to talk to the man, who came to be known as Gingletoof, to learn that he had been charged and punished for theft. As it turned out, the northman's money was no good in the Kingdom of Asheraven, despite making him very wealthy in his homeland. He could not pay his bar tab the morning after the party encountered him, which led to guards being called and stocks being filled. Before resting, the party paid the bar man and convinced the guards to release Gingletoof. In return, they required Gingletoof to agree to travel with them on the next expedition to the castle. They also told him that they were the ones who took his deed, firstly because they thought he was a fraud, and secondly because they knew he wouldn't have been able to go on his own anyway. Then, finally, the party spent several days resting, selling treasure, and gearing up.

As the first time, nothing of note was encountered on the way to the castle's entrance. The marching order now was Galdor, Altor, Zinra, Ginglecoof, Laurana, Stinky, who walked by two when possible and single file when not. This time on entry, the party moved east away from where the wolves were detected. Entering room 12, the pit trap did not activate, and the party searched the patches of discoloration where the wall once was covered with decorations. Finding nothing but three more doors, they decided to go again eastward. Room 13 was found covered in very fine dust at least as far as torchlight could travel. Altor entered first, and it was seen that the dust would kick upward if not crossed carefully. Galdor held a torch and saw the flame happily devour any dust motes that floated by. Still, recklessly, he entered the room with the torch to take a look around, which ignited the dust covering the entire room in a fireball-like effect. Both Altor and Galdor were hurt pretty bad, so Galdor traded places with Zinra, and Altor traded with Stinky. Since the flame was still raging inside, they went through the north door in room 12, going into room 10. The grand hall did not seem to marvel the players the slightest bit, and they proceeded through the room until they came to the statue holding a marble spear over a chest. Laurana checked for and discovered the trap that the spear would drop and impale whoever opens the chest, but she could not disable it with her thief skill. The party convinced Stinky to open it without doing anything to disable the trap; he only agreed in return for a full share of the delve's treasure rather than a partial share. As expected, the trap sprung on Stinky, who was hurt but alive. The treasure was collected, and the party decided it was time to leave. They returned to room 12 and back into 13 now the flames had ended. They searched

the ashes and found a gold letter opener, and then they left the dungeon and returned to Narwell.

Over their days of resting, they learned of a restaurant in town that had exploded in popularity during that time. The restaurant was called simply "Aldo's" and was owned by a man of that name. They learned that Aldo's was actually a long-established eatery for many years prior, although it was only in the last few days that their steaks had attracted the attention and palates of the entire town. It was also during this time that Zinra and Alfor left the campaign due to scheduling issues, and an elf cleric named Aileen and a human fighter named Vlad took their place. Once the rest was concluded, the party got into a very long line to eat at Aldo's. After several hours, during which many an argument and even a fistfight broke out, they were finally being seated and ordered. They saw that Aldo's had a humble interior and was, in fact, quite dated. Nothing about the atmosphere gave away what was so special about the steaks. Their steaks came, and they all ate what was inarguably the greatest-tasting steaks of all time. Stinky ate two steaks himself, and Vlad purchased one to take away with him.

After the party left and were headed to Topsy's to plot their next move, they were stopped by a voice coming from between two buildings saying "psst! Adventurers! Over here, I have a task for you". They saw it belonged to a hooded humanoid man, who stood beckoning the PCs closer. They approached, and he took down his hood, and he introduced himself. "Hello, I am Domino di Arguilo, the proprietor of DeFine Dining. As I say, I have a task for you...". He goes on to explain that he is but one of many restaurateurs

suffering from a severe lack of (i.e. zero) business since Aldo's began offering its new steak. He also says that he is part of the Guild of Restauranters and Innkeepers, which is an organization that ensures places of business in its domains are within its standards of healthfulness and safety. He invites them to eat dinner at Define Dining tomorrow, for free, where he will give them the full details of their task. The party, wanting at least one more Hit Dice before returning to Gingledeef's castle, accepts the invitation. While all of this resting and steak eating took place, a caravan arrived and settled just inside Marwell's walls, bringing merchants of many kinds as well as a circus and freak show that would be put on by the magnificent Grandolfo.

The next day came, and the party did very little until finally going to Define Dining to meet with Domino. The restaurant was predictably empty but beautifully constructed and adorned. Domino greeted the party members with aperitifs and hors d'oeuvres, which were followed by platters of exotic and well crafted foods. Yet, none of it compared to the succulent steaks at Aldo's. Once the party had eaten their fill, Domino departed from the kitchen and joined the party at their table. He explained again his membership to the Guild of Restauranters and Innkeepers and asked the party if they would aid the Guild in an investigation into Aldo's. He said "While Aldo's restaurant operates within the jurisdiction of the Guild, his supplier does not, so we have no legal authority to demand entry to their facilities, nevermind that we cannot even locate it". The Guild cannot disrupt the operations of those under investigation without proof of malfeasance. They also have been unsuccessful in following the supply cart to Aldo's, losing its trail every time. The task he

offers to the party is to learn what the secret to Aldo's steaks is and how to reproduce it exactly. It is also important to keep the investigation a secret, lest Aldo file a complaint against the Guild for harassment. The only incentive Domino offers the party is that he will ensure that they are "rewarded handsomely" in the case of success. Of course, the party agrees. Between this moment and the next set of actions, Galdor exits the campaign, and a gnome magic-user named Figlar Dustseeker joins.

That will conclude part 1 of the Asheraven Play Report. I see there being at least two more installments like this before I am caught up to the present, but it could be a good few more. Things are just beginning to heat up, though, as this investigation into Aldo's uncovers much more conspiracy than just that which involves steak. Thank you for reading (if you even could) and see you next week.

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