

THE KING IS DEAD

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In the faraway kingdom of Happyland there lived a king named William. William was a worthy king, a great king indeed. A king for whom the children sang while from gallows did their parents hang. A king for whom fair women swooned when he took the first nights from their grooms. A king commoners proudly served in the filth and poorness they deserved. Yes, he was great at being a king.

We begin on the day plans were started for the monument to King William. This monument was to stand so elegantly in the capital city of Mormac that William's splendor and Happyland's importance would be known forever. As Chief Chronicler of the King's Court I was there to record the proceedings so the future would know of the great things William did. Alas, it would not turn out to be a great day for the King.

"Which name do you prefer to use for the monument?" the Chief of Names and Labels inquired.

"'Monument de Willy' is a name that carries with it a hint of my greatness," the King replied, "use it."

The King gave it name, and name from his mind made the monument more real to us who paused to see it in our thoughts.

Suddenly the banging of worried hand on the wooden door shocked us out of our contemplation!

"Sire!" the Commander of Guards for Uraeus Palace yelled. "I have most pressing and dreadful news!"

"Let him in!" William pronounced.

The Commander of Personal Guards for His Majesty the King opened the door. Two men rushed in and quickly bowed to the King. One wore the robes of a priest, the other the mail of a man at arms. The second spoke as he finished rising.

"My men have informed me that your eldest daughter, the fair maiden Ellsmire has been snatched by a villain!"

Gasps were made throughout the room.

The King spoke first.

"Impossible! How could this happen!"

"I wouldn't have believed it myself if not for what I saw. The princess, gone on a solitary afternoon walk in the garden, as has been her custom of late, did not return. When my men went looking for her, they found no trace around the garden. Frantic, I returned to her room. There the priest Shepcree was holding a note that had just been found."

"The woman can *write*?" the King exclaimed.

"It appears so," Shepcree spoke. "And with Your Majesty's permission I shall read what she has left."

“Please do.”

“Dearest father and mother, I have decided that the life of a queen will be neither a happy nor comfortable one for me. Since I know you could never accept my decision, I have chosen to leave with a man I fancy. Please do not be angry. I shall never be a burden to you.”

The King demanded to know the name of the man she spoke of.

The commander told him, “One of the lady’s friends said that she had spoken of a Martin Smithson. The friend tried to guide the princess away from thinking of this commoner and was never told of her intentions to leave with him.”

“Who is this *Smithson*?”

The Guardian of Wisdom sat upright. “A peasant who fancies himself a scholar.” He spoke with the squinted eyes and wrinkled face of a man of learning. “He hasn’t been schooled at the court academy and therefore has not the correct viewpoint from which to see the facts. How thinkest he that truth could be found from down below? A proper schooling is the pedestal which elevates a man above the rest of humanity to where he can see all that is beneath him in perfect clarity and thereby gain knowledge of use to the King.”

“A delusional fool then? Is that the kind of man who has stolen my daughter from her rightful place?”

“Definitely my lord,” the Guardian continued. “My first encounter with him happened when he was seen teaching commoners to read for favors such as use of the King’s grain and a dry place to lay his head. And what he taught was neither the words of great men nor those of the God of Light. So-called ‘history’ books written by bumpkins, books on building things, even books on using weaponry! A typical coward, he fled from our capture, but we did put a peasant to the lash and told him our men were promised the use of his wife and children if he did not confess all of his dealings with the rouse.”

“What did he tell of our kidnapper?”

“Not much I am afraid. Just the name of a man who said he came from the country and was taught by himself and his father, a blacksmith. We couldn’t figure out where he might have gone.”

There followed great commotion in the room. Gradually a consensus was reached. The princess was in danger and required rescue. A character like Smithson was likely a Geldfiend, one of those blasphemous people who lived to trick and rob the true sons of the God of Light.

Solutions were resolved. The Chief of Righteous Peace was to immediately assemble an army to storm the City of Norgenport on the northern coast of the peninsula, a known refuge for Geldfiends and other misfits. A messenger later said that the Lord of the Southern Provinces stood with our great King Willy. He promised the support of his people and agreed that if the fiends were pushed out all of West Regallands could be forever united and peaceful.

Nearly four hundred brave Soldiers of the Realm were led from the city by General Grymace after being blessed by the temple chief. King William watched with pride as the mighty horses carried away the warriors clad in plate and chain. The men brought with them swords, warhammers, lances, and crossbows.

Though a brave king, William knew that he could best serve the God of Light by battling from his throne and not at the front. He had his war-shirt on to show that the kingdom was engaged in a fight.

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The brave warriors rode all day. After breaking camp the next morning they approached Norgenport and charged the entrance.

But alas - a spy had given the city time to prepare! The enemy attacked viciously with fire-breathing weapons that could fell an armored man from fifty yards. These demonic lead-spitting machines allowed a Geldfiend who lived a foul life in banking and commerce to easily kill a man who dedicated his life to the use of honorable weapons. Such a device that any simpleton could wield encouraged the dangerous tendency of taking the business of fighting into one's own hand, ungluing the bond to king and armies which is the very firmament of civilized life.

Very few houses were set afire before the embattled soldiers were forced to retreat from the small city. Their number was reduced by over a third but many enemies were slain. The surviving soldiers regrouped in the forests around Norgenport. Wounded were tended to, and preparations for a siege were begun.

Night fell, and most of the party slept uneasily in a clearing. They expected that the next day would begin with the construction of heavy fortifications to block roads leading to the city. Crops would be burned and waters poisoned with carcasses, to give justice a forceful position from which to work. A messenger had already been sent to the Southern Provinces to ask for ships to block access to the sea.

As most of the army slept, sentries noticed strange noises and movement from the brush. Suddenly the surrounding trees erupted in flashes and loud noise. Soldiers fell and horses fled. Within seconds, small canisters exploded in the clearing, sending metal into unarmored body parts and knocking dazed men to the ground. A most dreadful way of conducting war! As soon as these were finished, enemies rushed from the trees toward the disoriented and disorganized Soldiers of the Realm. As the good General Grymace tried to put order into the proceedings, he was shot and fell silently from his horse. This disrespect of honorable rank showed the true meanness inherent in the Geldfiend way of life! Their lightly-clad minions bounded over

obstacles and attacked the knights with axes, hammers, blades, and spears. The outnumbered soldiers slew many, but their numbers dwindled. Twenty battered survivors managed to fight their way through the horde and flee down the road. It is from them which this account has been taken.

In their flight, the twenty met a man carting goods toward Norgenport. They informed him of their situation. When the man was told that a villain had snatched the Princess, he said he had heard of a young couple traveling with books and hidden riches up the river from Mormac towards the Eastern Foothills.

Upon this information, two of the frantic knights acquired the man's horses and hastily set out to give the news to the King. Good William was horrified at the defeat, but heartened that more was known of his daughter's whereabouts. Norgenport would be dealt with later. At present, an army had to be assembled to defeat one of the kingdom's most persistent enemies—the Ostlanders.

For centuries, these hillmen and forest-wenches had infested the wooded foothills far to the east of Happyland. They were a constant source of ills in the kingdom. Most lived and hunted in heavily forested areas, and raised livestock and crops in clearings. Their lands were full of forges where all types of steel instruments were made from local iron. Most of their men were skilled in use of the longbow.

Some Ostlanders were fond of saying that their lands were governed by the rule of law and not by the lawless will of rulers – as if there was any source of rightful authority besides the glorious God of Light who shines on kings! Greed, lust, and wrath were truly all the Ostlanders cared for in their filthy forests of lechery. They were known to pass their women around amongst men who showed no rank. If Ellsmire had truly fallen into their hands, she would be ruined. Only a slow process of forced obedience to the court could get her close to her rightful place again.

The lengthy Zeng River flowed from the bowels of Ostland through the city of Mormac out to the sea. It had apparently been the route followed by the captor of Ellsmire.

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An army of thousands was assembled and marched upriver. They were soon to be joined by horsemen from the Southern Provinces. The heavily laden and hastily organized force took two weeks to get to the western ends of the foothills. Poor weather had provided cover for many cowards to flee. This and sickness had dwindled the army's ranks significantly. They numbered about 4,000 by the time they reached Pidon, a large town near the cursed forests.

Advance units rode into the town and were greeted by arrows. They fought back, slaying many. The fighting lasted a mere thirty minutes, and it became apparent that most of the town had fled to the forests and the opposition did not intend to make a stand there. Still, the army had taken losses. The town was pillaged, and the captured fighters were made to suffer as they told of the enemy's plans and Smithson's possible whereabouts. It was determined that Smithson was likely hiding in River Bend, a settlement deep within the forest. Many men watched for enemy activity during the night the army spent in Pidon. However, the night passed without incident.

At daybreak the army moved out of Pidon and toward the forested hills ahead. A deathly tension fell over even the bravest of the soldiers that foggy morning. As the brush along the road thickened and tall trees began to surround them, the men were greeted by an old wooden sign:

“Do not start fytes in this forest for yu will be finished wen they ar.”

The men needed no reminder of the character of the barbaric morons they would fight today. Two of His Majesty's soldiers immediately leveled the sign with warhammer and axe.

The mazelike roads that wined through the wooded hills made travel slow. Men could not ride more than two horses wide. A few captured enemies tied to the lead horses served as guides, which brought little confidence at the many forks and bends encountered.

Suddenly rocks tumbled down the hill and arrows flew - an ambush! The side from which the attack came was too steep and cluttered to be negotiated with horses. Though few in number, the shock of the boulders scattered the advanced ranks. Arrows from the King's column had difficulty finding their marks, who were in suits of green, gray, or brown and often partially hidden by thick trees. A charge was made up the hill, but the heavy armor worn by the men made them slow targets for the expert archers above. By the time they made it to where the archers were, nobody, not even a corpse, could be found. Yet arrows rained on them from a different position now. Many were convinced that only demons could shoot so well in such fog. The bloodied contingent regrouped and was now joined by men from ranks farther back. They sent arrows ahead and charged.

Then an even stranger occurrence happened. More rocks, this time falling straight from the sky! Men were crushed and the ranks broke again as rocks and tree limbs now rained. Unsure of what to do, the Duke Jarblis ordered his men off the cursed hill. They stumbled down the slope in a fright. A local man later said that the Ostlanders, upon hearing of the King's intentions with them, had quickly established trebuchets on a nearby hill and determined where projectiles would land for maximum effect.

Upon returning to the road the men found that another skirmish had occurred in their absence, leaving more fallen soldiers, including many of noble birth. The arrows had stopped flying, however, and there was once again no sign of the enemy. It was also found that all of the captured guides had either escaped or been killed.

An untold number of men had been put out of action. A contingent was sent to collect dead and wounded from the forests. Since many were now afraid to leave the roads, it was difficult to find volunteers.

This fear increased as the day went on and the army ventured deeper into the forest. Many times they had been ambushed by arrows, and those sent off the roads to punish the attackers often did not return. Though it was thought that many commoners who disappeared joined the ranks of the enemy, it was obvious that many were killed. The men grew even more uneasy as the sun got lower in the sky. They dreaded the thought of a night in the forest but the leaders demanded everyone press on, for their honor was at stake. To everyone's relief, an empty meadow was sited that could fit everyone. Temporary fortifications were immediately built. None slept well that night, though no attack did come.

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At daybreak, the camp was broken down and the army was again on its way. It would later become apparent that the Ostlanders had spent the night preparing for further treachery.

Advance units spotted a sign to River Bend and runners sent word through the long column. The marker appeared to be in its position for a long time and showed no signs of tampering. Tension was high as they traveled down the road. Attack was expected at any time.

The army marched for a little less than an hour when the sounds of a mighty river began to trickle through the trees. Then scouts returned to the main column with bad news. The only bridge over the river had been blocked. The Ostlanders had overloaded a dozen large carts with jagged rocks and boards filled with spikes, parked them upon the bridge, then smashed their wheels until the loads collapsed them into a giant heap. Horses would not be able to traverse the pile, and it would take a long time to clear.

It was immediately suspected that an attack would occur, so defensive ranks were formed. Scouts poured into the surrounding forest. An eerie silence fell over the men.

Artillery across the river soon made its presence known with flying rocks, logs, and even dead soldiers. Though the barrage apparently came from few pieces, the quickness of the assault upon concentrated troops killed a sizable number and put the King's men into great disarray. A small unit shed some of their armor to make an attack across the water. No sign of them was found after they disappeared into the brush on the opposing shore.

The army was made to regroup and again concentrate at the fork in the road where the sign was spotted. Here the leaders were greeted with more dreadful news. The supply train had been lost. A small contingent of bandits had made an attack upon those guarding it. When some guards entered the woods to fight them off, a large number arose from hiding and a melee ensued. At the same time, hundreds of bandits swarmed the rear of the supply train from the Ostlanders' right flank. The King's men were routed and the bandits fled down the road with whatever supplies they did not burn and disappeared once again. Searches for them yielded only casualties from booby traps.

A general discontent among the ranks ensued. It was eventually resolved that those for whom no horses were available would return to the area of Pidon and attempt to raise supplies, for little to pillage had been found in the forest. It was hoped that the brave knights of Happyland and the mounted archers and spearmen of the Southern Provinces would be able to ride to sustenance by nightfall.

Numbering less than five hundred, the horsemen were continually harassed by Ostland cowards who would unleash barrages from the crests of hills then retreat to the opposite slope.

The sun was barely above the horizon when four hundred fit survivors entered a farming village. A disintegrating sign labeled "SAURFIELD" greeted them. The town looked recently abandoned. Suffering from fatigue, hunger, and thirst, the mounted warriors searched the town. Suddenly, dozens of Ostlanders appeared from the tree-line and let arrows loose. The horsemen gave chase.

The enemy archers ran across a field, some falling to arrows from the mounted. It soon became apparent that there were a large number of archers and pikemen on the lightly vegetated hill ahead of them, but the soldiers were confident and lusting for a victory so they pursued.

The enemy archers on the hill began firing as their running comrades reached their positions. Smelling revenge for two days of defeat, the brave soldiers continued their charge. Then – witchery! The wet ground gave way below their valiant steeds! Men were flung from mounts. Horses' legs were cracked. Many men drowned and others got stuck in the mud. Some later said that this was no witchery, but a matter of diverting and damming water to flood a small depression in the ground, covering it with brush, and the barbarians memorizing where to step. But this should be understood as a mask for the true evil that took place.

As the horsemen in front fell, those behind wheeled to prevent the same from happening to them. Unfortunately the evening light was too dim for a great number to see why those in front fell, and so they were also caught in the trap. Many dismounted to attempt to help those stuck in the sudden bog. Immediately a barrage of arrows flew from the wooded hill on their right. The evening darkness prevented many from responding properly to the new attack until it

was too late for them. Others were caught among the obstacles and between barrages from two sides. Disorganized charges to the forested hill on the sides brought only death.

Survivors of the initial onslaught dismounted and hastily made formations of heavy shields and bows. Staying upon their horses would only see their mounts killed underneath them. Numbering around two hundred, the men began to advance towards the attackers in the woods. The blare of great horns then pierced the air. The men were shocked at what came next. Wild Ostlanders with every shape of blade and hammer imaginable, many with armor and shields, spewed out of the forest shouting bloody murder. Later rumors said Smithson was among them. The clash of steel was accompanied by many shouts from the dying and those killing them. The embattled soldiers killed many but were soon overrun. They began to be pushed into the water their brothers were stuck in. The remaining fifty surrendered to the bloodthirsty wretches.

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The footsoldiers had been bled enormously during their trek out of the woods. Within view of Pidon they resolved to burn as much of the forest as they could on the assumption that their mounted comrades would be able to ride to safety. But alas, the dark lord from below who helps those at the bottom of the human heap had made it rain. The fire was prevented from spreading and would later be extinguished by heavy rains and Ostlander effort. This combined with the loss of the mounted leaders left the footmen dispirited. Most made the long trek home over the plains that made ambush difficult (though casualties would prove it not impossible).

When the rain reached Saurfield, the bandits were taking possession of the captured soldiers' belongings. The King's men were held captive overnight. In the morning, each was branded on the arm and forced to swear he would never bear arms against Ostland again. They were then brought to the swift Zeng River. After taking even their clothes from them, the brutal Ostlanders sent them down the river on decaying rafts with nothing but sticks and parchments containing the forced oaths.

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News of the battles spread quickly through Ostland.

The princess was shocked at how many were killed for her father's love for her. She was unable to appreciate the sacrifice because the evil Smithson had blinded her to the fact that her life and her father's wishes were worth more than all the men that fought in those cursed hills.

Many Ostlanders were outraged at the bloodshed. It is said that those who denounced Smithson for bringing the army to the forest were quickly shouted down by more bloodthirsty folk who were glad for the opportunity to fight and didn't think they were finished yet. During drunken celebrations at which we can be sure much fornication was committed, Ostlanders all over the hills decided to go on the offensive: they would cross the plains (some of them for the first time), rile up as much support as they could, then march on Mormac itself.

In characteristically disorderly fashion, the bandits emerged from the forest looking for blood to spill. They rallied in Pidon, drinking the taverns dry and gathering much support for their cause of hatred.

It is said that Smithson was persuaded by his townsmen to stay in the forest with his captive lest the area be undefended while the majority of the men were out pillaging. I suspect that a coward of his caliber needed little convincing to stay out of the fight.

As the horde spread westward, other bandits, ruffians, and malcontents joined their ranks. Ostlander steel provided them arms, and eating the crops and stock that belonged to their frightened Betters kept the wretches on the march. News of the uprising reached Norgenport, which also rose against William. Defenses for Mormac were strengthened.

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There was naturally a rich bounty offered to any who could save the princess and slay her captor. The three Brothers Brennt, noble warriors of the highest order, left their fiefdom amid much celebration to undertake this mission. The next that was seen of them were three combat-mutilated corpses caught on rocks in the Zeng about halfway between Mormac and Ostland. The medallion around the neck of the youngest brother was stamped with Smithson's signature mark.

A dozen Happyland knights undertook the mission, though the only reward they sought was the reclaiming of honor lost in their earlier defeat to the bandits. An observer later told me what happened to them. They did not suffer massacre on the roads since the majority of the Ostlanders were out on the way to Mormac. However, they had much difficulty finding their way in the web of forest roads that now lacked all directional signs. Upon entering a town, they were approached by a large number of women of varying ages. Many fell to their knees and begged for their lives and possessions to be spared. Seeing this act, several of the knights dismounted. At once the wenches pulled weapons from under their cloaks, which also concealed light armor. Men were stabbed in the throat and face. Helmets were ripped from heads and every soft spot of armor was exploited with steel. Horses' tendons were slashed, toppling their riders to the ground. Before Sir Carlyle could get up, four of the women dropped a large rock

on his torso and arm, pinning him to the ground before hacking his body with implements of death. Sir Montgomery's skull was crushed with a hatchet. All of the knights were slain.

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There were also females with arms among the westward-moving horde that now could see the towers of Mormac in the distance. Soon their scouts came into contact with a large force from Norgenport, who had fire-arms of personal and artillery use in their ranks. A meeting was arranged between representatives of the two forces. The peasants of the east were at first untrustworthy of these strangers, and differences threatened to prevent cooperation. But the Geldfiends soon tricked the ignorant into alliance. Seeing that they both desired riches over the guidance of their Betters, they felt a common bond and so would all share the curse of the Geldfiends.

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The day of battle was warm. The fields around Mormac were crawling with the King's enemies, moving in loose formations with murder on their minds. The faithful fled to the city where they were levied into the ranks defending it. Many cowards and traitors joined with the enemy.

A mighty army, including honorable friends from the south, marched out to meet the enemy in plowed fields about three miles northeast of the city walls. Three rode forth to meet with the leaders of the enemy.

A raggedy crew of twelve ruffians stepped forward along with four riders.

"The King offers terms!" Duke Pelancy announced.

"Oh he's always offerin' terms – how much of our lives is he proposin' t' take fer lettin' us breathe this time?"

The insulted Duke detailed the terms in a stern voice. "The King will forgive your treason, forgive your murder, and forgive your theft if you hand over the fair Princess unharmed, deliver Smithson, and disband your forces."

Commotion arose from the leaders of the mob, many of whom shouted profane insults at the King's men.

"Typical king's bargain," one bellowed, "He gets everything and we get nothing! Just promises to let us live if we obey!"

"If you will not accept the terms," the Duke replied, "then you will have a fight."

“Yeah, what’r you gonna do?” an enemy rider taunted. “We got twice your numbers an’ we hate you!”

The King’s riders wheeled and rode back to their ranks. A few enemy arrows followed them, one striking the Duke himself. The horde was clearly not interested in civilized combat.

Large fire-weapons launched metal balls into the King’s ranks. The terror these weapons wrought was much out of proportion to their numbers. A deadly salvo of arrows followed, and armored footmen of the horde ran after them. Disorderly aggression would prove to be the enemy’s chief method of combat. Rebel horsemen charged the flanks of the Southern spear-riders who rode to attack the footmen.

A great clash of steel and men took place in the field. Behind the enemy footmen marched archers and some men with fire-weapons. They quickly joined the slaughter by firing into the rear ranks of the King’s soldiers. Our archers gave them much grief but would prove to be the weaker side by the end of the battle.

One particularly nefarious detachment of Ostlanders took pleasure in firing volleys at the Nobles commanding upon the hill. Only a few arrows hit their marks, but each wound was a grave insult and an affront to decency. The volleys also prevented any kind of orderly command to take place, adding to the chaos and confusion in the fields.

As the defenders of right were beaten back, the horde’s reserves were unleashed to make havoc in the rear. Several hundred men and a few women swarmed our ranks and a great many died.

After an hour of near total mayhem, the horn sounded retreat. Many of the enemy showed no mercy in pursuing the King’s soldiers until they were close to the city’s defenses.

Many good men were lost that day. It is said that those who were unable to flee were killed. There were a great number still able to defend the city, which was believed to be well fortified. Messengers were dispatched to all nearby kingdoms in the hope that our neighbors would understand the urgency of containing this aberration of rebellion.

All through the afternoon, the enemy army moved to surround the city. Word of the uprising had now spread throughout the peninsula and armed peasants and townsmen came from all over the countryside. Several messengers were forced to return to Uraeus Palace bearing the severed heads of others in their party.

The enemy forces were concentrated to the north of the city on its eastern side. Tensions were high as darkness fell. It was rumored an attack would come during the night. The King remained in his warshirt with no intention to sleep. He prayed for deliverance.

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There passed a night and a day of no enemy attack. Little rest was had by those in Mor-mac. Night fell again. Around midnight the sound of cannons shook the city. Fearful residents jumped from their beds. The enemy had blasted holes in the north side of the city walls with their powerful fire-weapons. The horde began pouring in. Soldiers who could not respond quickly enough were slaughtered. Arrows and other missiles flew through the night air.

Soldiers garrisoned at Hex Barracks were quick to respond. The elite First Battalion led the troops northwest through the streets towards the attackers on the other side of the Zeng.

Soon blasts from the east were heard as more Norgenport artillery breached the walls of the city in another location. Hundreds of horsemen, many clad in stolen armor, galloped through the breach to bring doom upon the reserves at Hex Barracks. Half of the First Battalion traveled back to face them.

As this happened, artillery that had been moved into the city from the north began bombarding the southern banks of the Zeng. Archers on the northern side also proved deadly to the men of the First who had been sent to meet them. Unable to hold their positions and eager to drive the wicked from their city, the brave men charged across the Delton Bridge. Bowmen behind them fired across the river, eager to drive out the enemy on the other side.

By the time the front line was three-quarters of the way across the 200 yard bridge, it was clear that the horde was in control of the opposite bank. Norgenport scum with fire-weapons poured out of alleys and shot into the advancing soldiers in a manner designed to instill as much terror as possible. But the elite First, even when seeing their brothers cut down next to them, continued the charge. As the Norgenport detachment reloaded, peasants with pikes and other armored footmen took defensive positions. Arrows from rooftops continued to cut down the King's men as they closed with the enemy. Other horde troops eager for slaughter ran from side streets to take on the advancing First. The battle was bloody and intense, with the enemy's troops about doubling our four hundred. The fighting was so condensed that some corpses remained on their feet for minutes after dying. Soon the King's men began to be pushed back toward the river. Many on both sides stumbled over corpses and slipped in blood that covered the cobblestones like a spring rain. Most who tried to flee across the bridge were shot. Dozens were pushed into the river where heavy armor drowned those not killed by missiles.

The destruction of the other half of the First was equally gruesome, but more dispersed. The multitude of small streets and now ransacked buildings of that quarter made it nearly impossible to hold rank. Horsemen from both sides clashed in the dark streets, trampling everything in their way. Many of the city's defenders retreated to Uraeus Palace, a heavily fortified structure with a moat fed by the Zeng on three sides, the easternmost of which formed a lake 500 yards wide. The southern side, where there was no water, contained some of the thickest

towers and walls in the continent and overlooked a great expanse of cleared field before the street.

The horde was now furthering its plan to deal with those towers. The defeat of the First and its supporting elements left many quarters of the city undefended. Ostlanders, Geldfiends, Norgenport misfits, peasants, and other dregs ran amok in the streets, destroying any symbols of order they could find. Official buildings were looted and burned. A gang of wild men wearing only warpaint, sandals, and amulets took it upon themselves to attack any isolated soldiers in the streets. By the end of the night they would be covered in gore. Drunken wenches with stolen swords killed many officials who were hiding in their homes. Under this cover of chaos, a variety of large artillery weapons were pulled through the breach in the east, and those arranged on the northern side of the Zeng were pulled across the river to be fired at the palace from the north or to join the others.

After much more slaughter, the palace was surrounded. Hundreds of enemies took up positions in the buildings on all sides of the palace. Seeing this happen from their watchtowers at the city walls compelled the remaining soldiers to make a final heroic attempt at the invaders. They desperately tried to capture the artillery that had brought so much destruction. Alas, the machines were defended by too many troops who were very eager to spill blood.

Artillery was arranged on the southern side of the eastern moat-lake. When the pieces were all in position, they relentlessly launched projectiles against the towers of Uraeus. The darkness concealed most of the weapons, though the guns could be seen when they fired. The palace trebuchets put up a heroic answer to the enemy until they were destroyed by the barrage.

Artillery arranged north of the palace complex quickly began launching the stones of wrecked buildings into all parts of Uraeus. This was a most frightening event. All of the women, children, and elderly were put in the safest places we could find. Every able-bodied man prepared for the worst.

The palace fortifications were pummeled by metal and stone until shortly before dawn. A flaming load signaled the end of the barrage and the beginning of the final attack. A dark wave of evil marched quickly across the fields, the arrows of our men thinning their numbers too slowly. A number of the enemy stopped to fire in formation at the palace guards, but many times more surged the remaining hundred yards into the compromised fortifications. Much blood was spilled at those posts, but it was soon clear that the attackers would succeed.

Willy awaited his fate with sword in hand. He assigned me and the Chief of Art and Creative Endeavors to stay with him to record his demise. We could now tell that the palace building itself had been overrun, the sounds of violence getting ever closer. We waited nervously in the King's chamber, worrying most about what these fiends might do to the women hiding in the palace.

The oaken door was bashed open and thirteen men stormed through. The guards at the door were put to steel and those nearest Willy were shot.

The Chief of Art and Creative Endeavors shouted in horror. “Darkness rises to hide the light! Turned on its head is the world of light!”

“Is there none who would face me solo like a man?” the King demanded.

One man stepped ahead of the line. He removed his helmet but gave no name. The eyes upon his angular and battle-soiled face blazed at the King like a pair of blue torches. He took a note from his bag with his right hand, and held a broadsword in his left.

“I bear a message from the fair Ellsmire to her father. The lady says: ‘I have been treated well. Suffice it to say that certain perceptions held in Mormac concerning Ostland character are incorrect. I am truly sorry for what these men might do to you. I assure you that they act primarily on account of complaints and vendettas long held against the position that you occupy. It is an unfortunate circumstance of our lives that we are torn apart by conflict, the powers of love and ideas proving in this case to be stronger than the ties of family. I hope that we meet again someday in a place where we can discuss this as I had wanted to discuss things with you as a girl.’

Your Ellsmire”

The blackguard who spoke then took to make sure that any meeting between the two would not be in this world. While the better man was still shocked by the message the attacker sliced the King’s head off.

The horror of the decapitation made me observe what followed in somewhat of a trance. The King’s headless body was carried outside, loaded into a cannon, and fired south. And the people of former Happyland were cursed with long life and responsibility for ages.