

As I related in a previous journal report I now have news of Sir Beryvus, he was indeed taken by this honour less scum of the Iron star. They have been trying to break his will so they can sell him. He was placed under the control of an easterner names Ko'Su'Gara who we slew. Lady Virana of the dark seers has cast her invocations and made him answer questions as to his activities and those of the iron star. She was kind enough to use some of her limited time in this ritual invocation to ask after my master. Ko'Su'Gara's spirit answered that Sir Beryvus was with his detachment until a few weeks ago, when he was passed into the control of the Denier Easterlings for 'further breaking before sale' - Ko'Su'Gara was 'moving some merchandise through the Easterling territory for resale' at the time.

Now I know where to direct my search but alone I can achieve little. The Vanguard however stands with me in our joint quest against the iron star and I am sure that soon we shall assemble and travel to the lair of these easterlings. It is to be hoped that my master shall soon be free of his captivity. Till then I continue to serve the lords of the city of Wolfhold as soldier and patrol leader.

In the second moon of this year is to be held a great slave fair and trading market. This is a regular annual event and this year it has been agreed that the Alliance will act as hosting power and provide security for the event. Vanguard as part of its ongoing investigation into slavery and the activities of the iron star consider this a good place to look for them. Accordingly some of us will be present as part of the Alliance force in the area. A small group of extremely skilled and experienced Alliance people will be present and a much larger number of regular guards and scouts.

Assembling at Wolfhold we were:

Warriors: Squire Arithis of the Eternal Order Spirit Warrior of the Fell Knights, Gutrot a Veteran of the Valley, Aldred a Veteran Crusader.

Mages: Lady Kevralyn Soulfire leader of the patrol, Harlequin Voidstalker of the yellow school, Melieth Blackbone Wizardess of the Black School,

Priests: High Priest Daark of the Dark Brethren, Lady Virana a Master Seer, Rahima Suhayma a Priestess of the Hospitallers, Khortaz a Priest of the humakti, Tersius a Druid,

Scouts: Roban Dreadbane, Jihad of the Assassins Guild

We travelled the many miles from Wolfhold to the fallow hills, our scouts were able to guide us around most troubles and aside from stepping over slain hordelings and the like we encountered little difficulty in our journey. As we arrived in the fallow hills the rangers and scouts forming the outer perimeter requested aid and Roban and Aldred were detached for a short while.

We were ordered to wait at the main hall, lord Giles of the valley would be briefing us.

At the hall we met, Quentin of the rangers, Gilreyan of the red school, Flix of the rangers, Brother John of the hospital, Ruff of the order of King Michael, Dreams of shadows a shaman. Later another warrior named Mucus joined this group.

We settled in and were joined by Giles. He informed us that a third patrol formed of militia under the command of Lupacuore was at an outer guard station and that Lady Kevralyn's patrol was to take over the outer guard shortly.

The laws of the fair are as follows.

The sanctuary Inn of the fallow hills is held by the drow of Annach Morananil. Should any of them arrive on non-fair business they are to be directed to the most senior Kern Valley person present, Lady Viranna or Sorcerer Gilreyan.

Ulrik the steadfast, assistant leader of the Rangers is in charge of security for the fair. The Dy Fa Dyn are in charge of everything else, Any non-security matters are to be directed to them. Security matters are our concern.

The fair is a neutral event, all cities are welcome. All visitors in the colours of the cities are to be made welcome and aided in any way. There is to be no conflict between cities, no provocation.

We as the guard force are not to antagonise others and may not take up arms except in clear self-defence.

Off world visitors are permitted but will have written authorisation to attend. These will be scrolls bearing the authorisation of the Dy Fa Dyn. Any visitors not wearing colours' and without such an invite are to be treated as outlaws and brigands.

Visitors in city colours may enter and leave in-groups of four or less, large groups are to be asked to wait at their camps.

Visitors attending for a conference are to be directed to the conference hall, a separate force maintains security here and this is not the responsibility of the Kern Valley forces.

The main hall may also be used for meetings but none save members of the Kern Valley Alliance are permitted to spend the night.

Visitors to the market shall keep all weapons and property, no items may be removed from them either arriving or leaving. No one shall take purchased slaves from their new owners.

Members of the Kern Valley may visit the market only if they have legitimate business, otherwise they are to be restricted to the security perimeter around the event.

Rules of the slave fair take precedence over all city, guild or sect rules while at the market.

Having gone through the lengthy documents which have been condensed to the rules mentioned above we paused to sample the snacks provided by the staff.

As we mingled I heard several people comment they felt unwell and found that several of those

who called upon the realm of life called here the good sphere were uncomfortable, unwell and upset. Checking further it seemed that all those present who used the good sphere felt the same way and the effect had started shortly before when we arrived.

No one else felt unwell or noticed any strange effects. I brought this to lady Kevralyn's attention as soon as was possible,

Some elves arrived, they were of the Laire Tinwe of the green heart. They came to speak against slavery and said they were disappointed that the Kern Valley supported slavery. Giles responded that this was the way to recover prisoners taken by other cities and that we were in fact paying ransom as they valley did not keep slaves.

Lady Kevralyn later mentioned that these elves had been slavers themselves for a thousand years using enchanted control collars to force obedience, these slaves were released some time ago and suddenly these elves are speaking against the evils of keeping slaves.

More visitors, this time from the white retreat. Lord Creyn head of the Hospitallers and Gelithian Nommass head of the Humakti. Over the course of the evening I was to speak with Lord Creyn several times and must conclude that he is either mad or has been robbed of his ability to act like an adult by some incurable injury. He acts like a child, an undisciplined one at that. The humakti wished to speak to those of the white retreat upstairs, Lord Creyn spoke to many present but spent much time being looked after by several of our healers to stop him being a nuisance.

The elves left during this time.

Giles restarted the meeting. Sorcerer Gilreyan is to lead the senior group, Lady Kevralyn leads the Vanguard group. Each group is to nominate a scribe and a head of security and provide a written roster of guards.

Shouts from outside alerted us to a hordeling attack although the skill and strength of those present crushed the creatures quickly and they were no more than an annoying distraction. With minor wounds treated we returned yet again to the meeting.

Gelithian Nommass now spoke. He said that we had an opportunity here, due to the concentration of Kern Valley forces in the area to investigate the activities of the shadowkeep.

Scouts have been observing shadowkeep activities for some time and both the Kalid Earthwarp and the Morgothians had been working with us to find out what the shadowkeep necromancers were doing. A representative of the earthwarp would arrive later to provide us with more information.

While we were listening to this speech we were all slowed but the effect was not a spell. It lasted a brief time and then was gone, none present could explain it.

Giles then said we were to take over the outer guard post.

We mustered and walked there through the darkness, weaving through trees and bushes. The outer post was a small hall beside a gate in the perimeter wall and was the main point of entry. Lupacuore and her patrol held the post here and we greeted them.

A Dy Fa Dyn and a man in grey stood by the gate, the man in grey was offering to sell two others, slaves he said. One in morgothian colours and the other a halmadonian. He claimed both were high priests and for a mere thirty guests each. Lady Kevralyn spoke to him and asked for his invitation, He fled quickly when she call us to take him and vanished into the darkness with our fastest in close pursuit. Lady Kevralyn said she thought he was iron star.

Our scouts returned shortly thereafter to report he had escaped in the woods nearby.

The two slaves were still there and both had been stricken dumb by magic. The Dy Fa Dyn agreed to have the spells removed and the two now freed people left with him.

We then took up post and guards were posted although the majority of the patrol remained outside talking. Lord Giles had given Lady Kevralyn some captured scrolls and she now had the time to read them properly.

Long duration protective spells such as magical skins or shields went down. All went down at the same time although several should have a few hours left while others had as much as a day or more to run. They were recast without problem.

Aldred arrived having finished supported the rangers on the perimeter.

Lady Mortifera arrived. She made an announcement that Wolfhold had formally agreed a treaty with the Dymwan and that henceforth no member of the city was to initiate any hostilities against our new allies. Valley law remained in full force and the Alliance was only with Wolfhold.

Lord Creyn then arrived and after babbling on for a while sudden declared that Rahima was his high priest, the look on her face was one of shock and surprise. She was roundly cheered and clapped. She then left with him to attend a meeting at the hall.

It was later related that all those who called upon the realm of life or the good sphere as they call it here had seen a vision at this meeting. A figure in white with a crown and cape of gold was seen to be leaving, other figures all in white joined him and they left together. Speculation was that this may be King Michael of the white retreat and the white seers leaving but none could say when or why.

A dark and suspicious figure was seen lurking nearby. Roban had arrived.

The captured scrolls reported that the leader of the shadowkeep, the leader of the shadow lords and many skin shriever are travelling to perform rituals in this area but the letters were not dated.

More visitors, a Dymwan and two undead bearers with a large box. The dymwan was high priest Kanvas Solast and he was here to attend the fair. He spoke to us but would give no more details. He went into the guard post to wait a while.

A short while later four more visitors, a major Urusus of the crimson feast and three escorts. He said he had business with the Dymwan.

A pathfinder named vine carrying reports to the hall.

Duke Hanrow of the white retreat and a white seer Perin. They travelled to the main hall, the duke said he wished to speak to all those of the white retreat present. We explained our healer, Rahima, was already at the hall. He walked off towards the hall. Not two minutes later Aldred of the crusaders came back from refreshing himself and was annoyed to learn he had missed the duke.

Inside the guard post voices were raised, it seemed that the crimson feast major wished to kill the Dymwan who had stopped there. Gutrot was able to talk him out of starting a fight and both departed.

Drow arrived, the leader was 18th wizard of house Alsor and he wished to speak to Lady Kevralyn privately, she later reported it was nothing important.

There followed a period of quiet, no visitors for an hour or so. Presumably with the lateness of the night there would be no more tonight.

Then cries of surprise and alarm. Every caster in the group had suddenly been stripped of all spells or invocations, all active spells and invocations had gone even though many had hours yet to run. All items had lost enchantments, all were reduced to the power of a normal person. As we stood trying to work out what had happened more cries of alarm, this time from those within the guard post as elemental type creatures with black and white stripes attacked them.

They fled outside and we formed up to engage this attack against our rear.

These creatures struck powerful blows of magic and as we had nothing but our agility to defend against them we suffer many wounded. By the time the last fell we were all badly wounded and with no healing and no healing we were in a serious situation. The creatures were hurt by our normal blows and cast a number of black magical spells such as weakness against us. The bodies vanished after death.

A scout ran up to report that all of the outlying guards had lost all magic and power, Ulrik had ordered that for safety all guards should gather together. We withdrew to the main hall.

Arriving there we found many wounded from battles with the same creatures and all without invocations or spells.

Then came an alarm, hordelings approaching. Everyone went out and we formed up across the approach to the hall. Hordelings rushed up and behind them came several more of the black and white elementals. These attacked both the hordelings and us. This was work for shield men and the rest of us spent much time at parry or block. The few with great agility among us were able to attack freely and the rest of us held the line while striking a few blows here and there. One by one we dropped them until the last was down. We were now in very serious trouble, no healing and not a single warrior with the health or strength to survive another such battle.

Leaving guards posted we returned to the hall to rest.

Slowly over the next hour or so we regained the ability to cast and our healers were able to meditate and begin healing our many wounded. Items with enchantments began to recover them slowly.

A heirophant arrived from the kalid earthwarp. He was here to give us more information on what was being done by the shadowkeep necromancers. It seems they are attempting to recreate a powerful ritual called the ritual of desecration, which was last attempted many years ago by the dymwan. The aim of the ritual is to replace the realm of nature upon this world with the realm of necromancy. Were this to happen then natural creatures would become undead and all undead would become natural to this world and hence no longer affected by dismissal. To do this a pair of rituals were being performed, one by the shadowkeep at a place called shadowglade and the other by the dymwan on the plane of the sleepless dead. Both rituals were focused upon a nature realm node in a druids grove nearby. These two rituals together were more powerful than a single ritual and needed the aid of many other casters. Four smaller supporting rituals were being performed to keep the main rituals stable. Earthwarp scouts were searching for these supporting rituals and we were asked to disrupt them as soon as they were found. These rituals have been in place for twelve moons now and are drawing to conclusion so we must act quickly.

While he spoke Lord Snarlow quietly entered the room.

I spoke to Quentin who was designated scribe of his patrol. Unfortunately he seems unskilled in these matters, he had scribbled a few lines to cover the events of this evening. Hardly of much use.

Lord Snarlow called a meeting of all those of Wolfhold present. Once everyone not of that city had left we sat in silence for a long time. I sat at the table in the centre of the room but everyone else hugged the walls and corners furthest from the candles.

Lord Snarlow threw some money on the floor, after a short pause Orme picked it up. Snarlow after some talking to Orme said he liked his bravery. Tanis then stepped forth to address Lord Snarlow. Lord Snarlow asked who he was, Tanis replied. Lord Snarlow again asked who he was and finally asked demanded to know if Tanis consider himself to be Lord Snarlows equal. The guard knocked Tanis to his knees and then went round the room ensuring that the rest of us were likewise kneeling.

After some more talking that was mostly personal Lord Snarlow began to speak of leadership. He asked several of us about leadership and when he asked me I said simply "A leader must Lead". Lord Snarlow said that was his point exactly and then asked me should he execute his assistant guild leader, as she was not doing her job. I replied that she should be punished in the method reserved for such in the traditions or laws of the seers.

He then turned to Lady Virana, no 4 of the dark seers and asked her why she was not doing her job. She was somewhat confused by this as she was fourth not second. The upshot of much talking was that Lord Snarlow announced he had business outside of the city and that she was now acting guild leader and she would take his seat upon the council.

He also spoke much of death and a time of carrion and crows, of having played this game before. He was most insistent on questioning Lady Kevralyn as to the location of Lord Spellsword. He said that to be seen to sit upon the sidelines was to be seen as weak and this was not a time to seem weak. He then left.

With this concluded I left the meeting to find many had already retired. With the rangers providing outside guard I dismissed the remaining guards and retired for the night.

Come sunrise I rose and armed and armoured I broke my fast. Then with everyone else still abed I stood watch.

A scout arrived about an hour later to report that the outer guards were standing down.

More time passed as I stood watch. A few of the others were now up and breaking their own fasts.

A Dy Fa Dyn came running towards the hall, a few seconds later hordelings came into sight chasing him. I called to arms. I let the Dy Fa Dyn into the hall and then held the door. Daark and Lupacuore responded to my call and we quickly hunted down and slew the few hordelings.

Over the next hour or so everyone else finally rose. Spells and Invocations with long durations from yesterday were again present and working normally. It seems that the strange events of last night did not remove the magic and power so much as suppress it and with the coming of daylight things return to normal.

We had several minor attacks by hordelings.

A scout arrived. He had directions to one of the shadowkeep rituals over an hour's walk away. We mustered and set out. Passing the perimeter of the fair and walking for another hour without trouble. Finally our scouts reported a group of undead on the path ahead. They were led by a Dymwan.

I approached and cordially greeted him. He named himself Thaddeus Vane and greeted me in return. He explained that he was watching the area ahead of us which was extremely dangerous with many elemental type creatures roaming and attacking. He was warning us of the danger in the spirit of our new Alliance and did not wish us to come to harm.

He then departed but left his undead behind. Lady Kevralyn asked me were they likely to be hostile, I thought not and was prepared to walk past them. She felt they were a risk and ordered them destroyed. A brief battle and they were done for, rather pointless in my opinion.

We then pushed on into the wet and swampy lands ahead. On a path on the steep banks of a large pool of water our scouts reported green figures ahead, maybe elementals. We approached them and came under spell attack. The path was narrow and the steep banks prevented more than two of us fighting at once. The elementals cast a great many spells, vanishing a number of magical weapons and vanishing Lady Kevralyn when she began to bombard them with magical bolts.

The creatures struck powerful blows of magical damage and we sustained many wounds. One was able to push round us by crossing terrain we could not guard and it assailed the rear of the group. Finally we finished them off and spent a good time healing injuries. Both Khortaz and Gutrot had fallen, Gutrot having been saved by a guardian spirit and Khortaz by an elixir potion. Both required rest and substantial healing.

Finally we were able to advance. After passing the lake we began to travel uphill and then found our path blocked by hordelings. There was some shouting between our scouts and the creatures. Something to do with puppies, a beard and men in blue. I did not pay attention, as it was clearly nonsense. The only thing the hordelings did say that made sense was when they were complaining about being changed and experimented on. We slew them after a fight protracted by the narrowness of the path.

During the course of the battle I had seen bandits watching us from a short distance away. As the last hordeling fell they turned to flee and vanished before my eyes. Aldred's pole arm also vanished to reappear back down the path behind us. This strange magical teleportation had happened before in the hall when I had gone on watch and then suddenly found myself back in the hall in front of several startled people who had seen me leave minutes before.

Advancing up the hill we encountered more bandits. These wanted us to stop kidnapping their people and using them in experiments. That had no specific information and accused us because it was a group of mixed creatures and people doing and we were a mixed group so it must have been us.

We carried on finding the way ahead increasing steep and difficult.

Then figures were seen shambling over the crest of the hill and down towards us. A pair of undead woodsmen, and a greater undead root. Then before we had recovered our breath from

slaying these tough foes greater skeletons and a wisp attacked us.

One by one we crushed our foes and the last fell before our blows. Checking our wounds we found the healer Rahima was down and unconscious. Khortaz dealt with our many wounds as our scouts called an alarm. Mor silvani were approaching.

Lady Viranna tried to speak to them but due to an earlier injury her voice was too quiet to be heard over the howling winds that pushed against us near the hill top. I went to speak in her stead. As I was talking to the leader of this group I was struck several times with minor but painful blows and as I spun round I saw our healer running off being chased by several others in the group. Finally she was caught and held down. It seems she had weakened herself by over casting and some form of minor undead had manifest itself within her.

The mor silvani watched this and then when I was able to talk to them again without dodging the attacks of our hospitaler said we should leave this area immediately.

Lady Kevralyn arrived and I relayed the message, she called for attack and battle began.

This fight was made difficult by a number of spell like effects that seemed to erupt from the very earth. The enemy was strong but we had them outnumbered and once we were able to regroup after the waves of fear and spells that had scattered us I was able to co-ordinate attacks to defeat them one by one.

With fighting done we withdrew a little to find a somewhat sheltered spot where our healer was able to meditate. She was upset at having attacked other members of the patrol and spent some time alone refusing to talk to anyone. Eventually she meditated and began to heal people.

While we rested we were attacked by earth elementals, first two then a third wandered up and attacked. These were beaten down with magical weapons and only Roban suffered great harm. A very powerful magical missile struck him just after he shouted look its holding something in its hand. He was restored with an elixir potion as in addition to the missile he was then struck while unconscious on the ground. The rest of us were under the effects of an earthquake spell and could not help.

He was healed and we finally made it over the crest of the hill.

Ahead the hill sloped down and away into heavy woodland, the only easy way into the woods was guarded by a mor silvani elite warrior. He withdrew slightly as we approached and when our scouts shouted there was a ritual behind him he withdrew to be joined by a second warrior.

We approached and founded the ritual. A large circle with an alter on one side and four small circles on the opposite side. Within the large circle was a mor silvani caster, within the smaller circles were a bandit, an elemental, a hordeling and an undead. The caster warned us of dire consequences if we interrupted his casting.

We engaged his warriors on a steep muddy hillside, slipping more than fighting. As we hurt the elite warriors they withdrew into the circle and were healed by the caster. Finally one was blinded by a powerful spell and the other had his arms stunned. With these rendered harmless they were quickly slain leaving only the caster.

I tried to organise action, getting someone to check the five circles for power or magic. I shouted this and when I got no response called again for action when I was driven off by an invocation of fear. I returned once the fear had gone to find nothing had been done. I called again for the circles to be checked and asked had anyone tried to kill the creatures in the smaller circles. No one had so I tried and found that the undead could be hit. I called for it to be slain and started hitting it. Aside from Gutrot who was unable to move having been entombed no one else did much to help. The undead was slain and I again called for the other circles to be checked when again a great fear overcame me and I fled. Returning again I found that the circle had been identified as a power ward and that those with a high enough status could pass through. I called for those who could pass to attack the caster who was still performing his ritual. The caster clearly saw that I was the only one organising the patrol and again drove me away. This time with a more powerful invocation that left me unable to contribute for a full quarter hour.

Jihad had worked his way around to the far side of the circle and after the caster had driven me off and was distracted by the remainder of the patrol he breached the ward and struck several mighty blows. Others also joined him and at last the mor silvani was killed. With his death I was able to return.

Lady Viranna was able to commune with the ritual and reported that it was unstable. If left it would release undead into the area and have a detrimental effect on magic's. We needed to finish it but do so in such a way as to alter its function.

Some shadowsfall turned up to watch what was happening. While we made ready for this undead began to arrive, drawn to the area by the incomplete ritual. First crimson tender, then it was joined by a will o the wisp and some form of darkness creature casting black magic. I was struck by a powerful bolt of black magic, which fortunately struck the dark skin protecting me, and caused minor damage. The crimson tender seemed to focus its greatest attack on me and with its touch I found myself falling back with half the blood in my body gone.

We drove the undead back and slew them. Then returned to complete the ritual. This was done and those involved Gutrot, Tersius, Harlequin, Lady Kevralyn and Lady Viranna seemed unhurt. Aside from Lady Viranna the others had taken the place of the creatures in the small circles and each fell unconscious for a few minutes then woke fully healed and full of energy.

We withdrew a short distance and our healer cast a mass cure mortal to heal everyone while Tersius prepared good berries for Daark and myself.

Then we began to leave the area intent on returning to the hall. Our scouts found us a path back down the hill and we descended some distance before elementals were seen ahead of us. These were green elementals and strangely behaved much like hordelings or sprite, that is to say squeaky hi pitch voices and frivolous behaviour. They started hugging people and then Aldred who had been hugged called that he had been slowed.

With hostile intent proven by these creatures we advanced to slay them all. The fight was protracted due to the steep and slippery nature of the ground and the speed of these creatures in fleeing us. Still we caught and killed them all then treated our wounds.

The two scouts set off again and found us the quickest route out of the swampy land we were in. We followed the path down and finally we could see solid ground and an end to the hills and swamp land. Then hordelings rushed to block the path.

Daark Went forward and threw himself at the creatures drawing the attacks of many. The rest of us climbed over the bushes and barrier at the end of the path and joined the fight. They were

fairly normal hordelings and we were easily their match except for the one that led them. A troll and a foul looking brute at that, armed with a pair of blades no longer than daggers yet striking with the blows of eight men. His furious attacks came at such speed that any that faced him suffered many wounds in the space of a few heartbeats. It pushed into our lines and because some still fought on the path and others in the field it was able to attack Lady Kevralyn through a gap in our fighting line. She fell badly wounded and I stepped over her to hold off the creature while Rahima healed her.

Such was the speed and strength of the beast that I suffered a score or more of blows from it and by the time others came to aid me I was near death. Quick healing from Rahima saved me from falling in battle this day.

With the others dead we were able to cast the many spells of healing needed and set off once more for the hall. Away from the dense woodland of the swamp our scouts were able to guide us past any other threats and we were able to return to the hall in the twilight of dusk.

Both of the other patrols were still out, the senior patrol had gone to disrupt another of the support rituals and Lupacuore had led her patrol out to cover the surrounding area during the daytime.

After a while the senior patrol returned. They had been able to disrupt the ritual they had targeted. They had also met and killed a member of the crimson feast called major javis. He took offense at the Alliance having killed his men some time ago. Major ubusus was also there and he later said that he had no problems with this as the true bloods of the crimson feast had set javis to watch over him.

They came upon a Dymwan who had a scroll that mentioned "these undead must be taken to drakenor, use two per kalid and do not use any additional instructions". Also many Dymwan of small skill have been seen leading groups of undead. They all seem to be going in the same direction but it is not known where they are going. Perhaps this is to do with the Dymwan meeting on mount grimm in the near future. They also met a group of shadowfall who were looking for Lady Melieth, Melkeron and runt, this was to do with shadowfall business and they would not say more on the subject.

Gutrot called us together to assist him in a ritual to activate some tribal tattoo's that he bore. This was fairly complex and involved the support of all of Vanguard. It was completed and only time will tell if it was successful.

Lupacuore and her patrol had returned during this time and I spoke to them after the ritual finished.

They had fought and defeated several enemies intruding on the area of the market. Included among these was a group of slavers from the celestial bureaucracy. The patrol fought and defeated a monk of the midnight sun who told them that monks of his order were aiding the iron star, he also led them to a camp where the iron star were holding slaves for the market. These proved to be the last remnant of the followers of Ko'Su'Gara and they were slain by Lupacuore and her people.

The freed slaves, a blue wizardess from the Concilium names Oppot, a drow from house Alsor and an unnamed human. The Concilium later sent a representative with a reward and words of friendship. Oppot confirmed from having spent time with the slavers that they were the last of the iron star within the celestial bureaucracy.

Then the servants announced the evening meal was served. The staff here provided a fine feast, I myself partook of the roast chicken and fine it was. Perhaps the staff here have served other Alliance banquets as when they had extra roast potatoes they came straight to me. I would not, of course, see good food go to waste. It's my many years of service in the army with Sir Beryvus that taught me not to waste food.

Then they served a wonderful desert and I was content with the world.

Ulrik of the rangers placed Lady Kevralyn in charge of security. She, naturally, asked me to organise the guards. I had already been doing this but with authority now I continued to ensure we had guards and a watch during the evening and following day. I shall here commend Lupacuore and her patrol, with only one exception they stood many watches with me. Even the sprite stood a watch although I made sure others were with her. Of those others present Gutrot, Tersius, Flix and Aldred stood several watches each. Among the others I had great difficulty, as usual, with getting them to stand watch. It seems the more experienced or powerful the Alliance folk become the more they seem to see standing watch as a job to be avoided or passed to the militia. The ranger Quentin did come out at one point then realised he had no armour and nothing but a cup of coffee to defend himself with. He went back inside and did not return.

Over the next hour or so a number of small groups arrived, these were the members of the ruling council of Wolfhold with guards and other important people from that city. Sir Termigan, the leader of the black school, Bael, Lady Mortifera, Puke speaking on behalf of Lensal Blackbone, Shadow, Eremor Shaderiver, Vor Charmshaper, Lathrodec first high priest of the church of Iolth. All had been summoned to attend a council meeting but none knew who had issued the summons.

We then went to the meeting hall in-groups. The guards and escorts who had arrived in significant numbers with the Wolfhold dignitaries surrounded the area in force and I was able to call in our guards so that they could witness the meeting.

All arrived and sat at the meeting table, Giles and Sky were present to represent the valley and Gilreyan to speak on behalf of the white retreat, Everyone talked for a few minutes and then Dread Lord Arakis entered the room. He walked to the head of the tower and sat in the empty chair there. There was some comment about the chair being reserved for Lord Spellsword but Dread Lord Arakis pointed out that he was not present.

There was much talk of the missing leader of the city, the leader of the black school said Lord Spellsword would attend in his own time. Shadow stepped up to the table and announced herself as the leader of the assassins. Questions were asked as to where was Atalante and comments made that only Lord Spellsword could appoint new guild leaders. Dread Lord Arakis asked her to sit at the table.

Black Rod entered the room. He said the meeting was illegal, as Lord Spellsword had not called it. He said that he spoke with the voice of Lord Spellsword. Dread Lord Arakis said he heard Black Rod talking not Spellsword. After talking a little Black Rod called on all those loyal to Spellsword to leave saying that he would note those who attended this meeting. There was a pause where no one moved and finally the leader of the black school and Vor Charmshaper stood and left.

High Priest Lathrodec stood and declared to Black Rod that he was withdrawing his status, he also announced that he was withdrawing from his current family and forming a new family. He also invited any present to join his family and Lady Kevralyn and Master Harlequin did so. Lady Kevralyn then took the chair at the council table left empty by Vor Charmshaper. Dread Lord Arakis reminded him to declare this officially to Lord Spellsword when he returned. I was later informed that Roban was also under consideration as a new member of this family.

Dread Lord Arakis then spoke. He said that the continued absence of a leader left Wolfhold weakened. Many decisions could not be made, people could not be promoted to replace those who had left. He proposed a steward be appointed to run the council until such time as Lord Spellsword returned.

Bael stood and said he did not support this, he spoke on behalf of himself, Vetzlar and Attalas and they did not support Dread Lord Arakis as steward. He then left.

Dread Lord Arakis then spoke to all those present and asked if they supported him as steward. Sir Termigan asked that he affirm this was until Lord Spellsword return, which the Dread Lord did. In turn each gave their support. He then said that there were many empty chairs on the council.

He confirmed that Lady Viranna held the chair of Lord Snarlow until his return, he confirmed that Shadow was to hold a chair as head of the assassins. He asked Puke on behalf on Lensal Blackbone that Lensal Blackbone accept a seat on the council. He asked Lady Mortifera to take a council place and also Mothac Storm. The council now consists of:

Lord Spellsword
Dread Lord Arakis
Sir Termigan
Bael
Lady Viranna, acting head of the dark seers
Lensal Blackbone
Lady Mortifera
Black School Guild leader
Mothac Storm
Shadow

The current head of the Dark Path has stepped down, Dread Lord Arakis is now head of the Dark Path and this sect has withdrawn from the Valley City and returned to Wolfhold.

Giles said his was uneasy about these events He also spoke about valley law and the response of Wolfhold to violations of this.

Dread Lord Arakis said that any matter of death caused by those of the Alliance would be dealt with by the council who would agreed upon a punishment. Sky questioned this. Sir Termigan said that it was quite clear, for those who broke the laws of the Alliance and caused harm the matter would be dealt with by guild or sect, where death was caused it would be dealt with by the council.

It was pointed out that the Laws of the Kern Valley Alliance are not written down anywhere, not even on the document that formed the Alliance. Only word of mouth and personal interpretation determined the law. This surprised me greatly, how can an Alliance of laws not have those laws written such that all can see them and know that they do no change. I had known there was much of Chaos in the Alliance but to exist with out written laws is an invitation to disaster.

It was agreed that all three cities would meet and settle the laws between them, such laws to be written and made available to all. Also each sect and guild was to make clear the punishments for breaking of such laws.

The Dread Lord then called upon the other cities to recognise and support him as steward.

Giles said he could not offer such but did offer his blessings on the return of Wolfhold to stability. Sky said it was a matter for the Primus to decide. Gilreyan said it was a matter for the king and court to decide.

The Dread Lord said messengers would be sent to the other two cities asking for their support.

It is disappointing that those who have so long and loudly called for order and stability within Wolfhold felt unable to support it when it seems to be happening.

Sir Termigan said Bael was against the steward and could muster considerable forces in the form of the iron guard and its allies. He would back down if he faced the unified might of the Alliance. Dread Lord Arakis then said he would give the other cities a week to reply, after that if they did not stand with the steward and council then it was likely that Wolfhold would be in a civil war as Bael and his allies took up arms against the council.

Dread Lord Arakis also said that he was spoken to the city of shadowkeep about a non-aggression pact. Sir Termigan said that was a matter for the council to decide on, the Dread Lord agreed and said that the council should move to a more private location as they had much to discuss.

Many members of the council left.

I spoke to Sir Termigan. He said that regardless of what had been said in the meeting today, both he and Bael were fully supporting the hunt for the iron star. They had transgressed against the Alliance and they must be made to pay. He said we would have the full support of the council no matter where our pursuit of the iron star should lead. He wanted us to follow them wherever they should be and show them what happens when you strike against the Alliance. He also made a generous offer of funds to support our quest

We also spoke on the matter of loyalties and allegiances and he wished a speedy conclusion to my quest.

I returned to the hall, most of the others had already gone. A group of drow remained deep in a private discussion.

At the main hall I made sure we had guards set and joined them to discuss the events at the council meeting. After a while a scout ran up to report a sizeable group of shadowkeep and undead heading directly towards us. The scout gave Tanis directions to where they were and leaving Lupacuore and her patrol to guard the hall we set out to intercept them. Both Lady Kevralyn's patrol and Gilreyan's patrol joined forces and we follow the directions given to us by Tanis.

There was obviously some confusion, as we found nothing. We then did a complete circuit of the hall and market with our scouts widespread looking for any enemies. After searching many fields and woods we finally we sent Tanis back to the hall to get more directions but he said the scout had gone.

Then we found them, a sizeable group and heading away from the hall. We quickly engaged them. A solid battle line was formed and we held firm against the many powerful attacks they cast upon us. The constructs in their force required many blows to fell and struck back with

much force. Some of these felt only the blows of mace and staff, others only the touch of empowered weapons.

The most vulnerable of them were the mortals and I was able to co-ordinate our attacks against several of these in my section of the line. With them dead we were able to flank the strong enemy centre. Our scouts hunted down the ghouls and we were then able to concentrate on the greater undead and constructs.

Through out the battle Giles's voice was constantly heard exhorting us to hold firm. All but one were felled, the last skeletal creature hid in a dense thicket of woods until it was flushed out and cut down a few minutes later.

Then after treating our wounds we returned to the hall to find Lupacuore and her patrol with many wounded among them. It seems that after avoiding us in the darkness the shadowkeep attack fell upon the hall. Here Lupacuore and her people held firm against almost suicidal odds and many were felled as the undead forced into the hall.

However with the Alliance people helpless before them the shadowkeep checked their identities and then quickly left leaving them alive but mostly paralysed behind them. It seems to me that this attack was clearly aimed at killing specific people and those people were with the two patrols in the woods. The shadowkeep may have been trying to kill a few people before the non-aggression pact is agreed upon and didn't want to leave a large number of dead behind to threaten the signing of the pact.

Who ever it was they were after was not clear as they went on to meet our combined force and did not seem to attack anyone more than the rest. However as we aggressively took the battle to them they may not have had a chance to concentrate on their targets.

Several shadowsfall arrived, one an advocate who wished to speak with the leaders of the senior patrols. This conversation went on for some time but seemed to have been about Inns and the use of them. The shadowsfall seem concerned about travel between them. They would not, however say what it was that really concerned them. They did not wish us to know what they knew others to know and as they did not wish knowledge of this nature to be known they would not tell us so we would not know what it was we didn't know. If that sentence seems strange the actual conversation was far worse.

A ranger arrived to report the perimeter now held by scouts and rangers. I dismissed the guards and retired.

The following morning I rose with the sun to find it snowing, a heavy fall that carpeted the ground. This blanket of snow along with the fresh crisp air seemed to me like a new start, perhaps a sign that last night's council meeting will bring a clean slate and a new start to the city of Wolfhold.

I broke my fast, spent a few minutes updating my notes and then took watch. All was quiet for some time and the others began to rise.

Not long after my second coffee on watch an Alliance scout ran towards us crying undead close by.

A force on undead and shadowsfall attacked quickly, a ghoul charge the doorway and Flix and I fell to its claws. I was restored to movement having been dragged into the hall. With everyone mustered we pushed out once more and formed up against them. This force included a crimson tender and as was becoming all too familiar it rushed at me and with a touch tore away the vast majority of my health. I staggered back to find healers leaping on me from all directions.

Our fighting line held firm and even those of Lupacuore's patrol stood shoulder to shoulder with us and did not yield a single step. The enemy fell before us and the last few fell back along the path away from the hall. We pursued and defeated them.

The druid returned. He had information as to the grove being used to focus the shadowkeep ritual. We were to travel there and stop Hatchnet finishing the rituals. Lupacuore's patrol were to escort the druid to another nearby grove and join us later.

We mustered after the usual disorder I have come to expect from the Alliance and then set out following directions given to our scouts. Travelling some distance we reached a narrow tree lined path at the end of which we encountered a great spirit of nature corrupted and an escort of undead along with another crimson tender.

The spirit was able to use its powers to charm several members of the group to defend it from us which merely delayed its death at our hands. The escorting undead fell quickly and we surrounded the creature trying to avoid its heavy blows of power while beating it to death and

avoiding being attacked by our own that had fallen under its control.

With it dead at our feet we treated wounds and several of our casters settled to cast large spells or invocations.

Lupacuore's patrol came into sight and joined us a few minutes later. They had performed a druidic ritual and had been strengthened for the battle ahead.

Then a mass protection against undead was activated and we set off to the grove.

Approaching the grove along a narrow path we found two ways into the grove, the way ahead guarded by several mor silvani elite and a bone construct and to our left a narrow opening in the thicket held by a single elite. I ordered Lupacuore to take her patrol to the flank and hold the gap then called for Vanguard to advance and crush our foes.

We stepped forward and engaged the elite warriors, I drew my mace and went after the construct as it took no harm from any blade, Tersius joined me and we beat it severely. The elite fell before us and we advanced into the grove area to find many undead, a harridan, and two circles set up as those we had previously faced.

We fell upon the undead and one by one dropped them only to find the harridan raising them again. It seemed all but impervious to our blows and in return its blows fell heavily upon us. I tried to organise our warriors and Sun Tzu to drop an undead and then Sun Tzu would drag it away from her reach. The fallen undead were finally blessed to stop her calling them back.

Hatchnet remained in the circles and cast several powerful spells. One of his missiles withered my leg and caused me great harm. For the remainder of the skirmish I was able to do more than try to direct and co-ordinate until my wounds could be treated and my leg restored. Several others fell to the same missiles.

Then after many blows and much hard work the harridan fell and only hatchnet and the ritual circles remained. The two circles formed the focus of the rituals performed off world. One was full of skeletons and was linked to the plane of the sleepless dead, this was disrupted quickly and the undead smashed.

The other circle held hatchnet and was stronger because of his presence.

Lady Viranna performed a commune on the disrupted circle and came under attack through the still intact link to the other circle. Her hand and arm where she was touching the circle began to turn to wood and only the actions of Quentin in cutting off her hand saved her from a terrible fate.

Hatchnet continued to perform the ritual in the circle and had slain two of the four creatures in the linked circles before we were able to break into the other lesser circles and slay the creatures within. As the creatures fell hatchnet was clearly weakened and as we slew the last he used magic to flee.

With the ritual now completely disrupted the final circle, that linked to the shadowglade faded and the wheel of time was able to start once more. The rituals seem to have tried to stop the passage of time holding nature in a permanent state of winter within the grove, this was being powered by the sacrifice of the victims in the lesser circles. With the rituals broken nature slowly restored itself to normal across the area.

We returned to the hall and resumed guard until the market concluded at the end of the day. Then the traders and the like dispersed having had an uninterrupted few days of trading.

We then separated into our patrols and left to take up other duties.