

Chronicles 02

It is with a troubled heart that I pen these next words, for having gone through my previous notes I can see that I took part in acts of slavery. To some who read this they may see no wrong in this but to me, I cannot condone the actions that I seem to have partaken in.

The heat, the thirst ... this cursed place perhaps has driven me to the brink of madness and yet it would seem that my eyes have once more been opened and I offer my thanks in prayer to Sigmar for guiding me back. As I write these words I vow to return and undo the wrong I have done as soon as I am capable of doing so, but for now there are those currently in my care that are my highest priority and need to be escorted to safety from these heathen lands.

Leaving the valley was a necessary choice for our sanity and perhaps our very lives and despite now knowing that we left behind poor souls, even if they were heathen ones, to a fate worse than death, I know I will one day go back.

Our lack of knowledge and skill in these lands hamper us greatly and keep our speed low. The foul beasts they call camels and use, as beasts of burden are evil incarnate and if it wasn't for the fact that we need them to carry our food and water I'd have put them to the sword days ago.

They smell terrible, have the most aggressive temper and will kick and bite at you if you let your guard down and even when you are not in reach, they'll spit at you on a whim. Another reason that proves these lands are cursed.

Since no one else seems inclined to even attempt to work with them the task rests with me to look to the creature's welfare. I have heard words spoken behind guarding hands calling me 'Camel Herder' and I am ashamed to say that my temper rises in hearing it, but through Sigmar's guidance, I manage to continue with my duty. These poor dim witted fools just can not see that in order to survive these lands we have to bend our backs to tasks beneath our station, I do not seek their plaudits or their thanks but this is a test of my resolve which I will endure.

We have found some respite amongst a small mining community so I now take this time to write about events since leaving Myrmidia and her valley.

Our numbers are close to thirty, some of who are wounded, and with four camels a horse and a goat our travelling speed is tediously slow. So much so that it seemed as if our supplies would not last us nearly as long as first estimated. That was until it was noted that those damnable Halflings were stealing additional supplies to appease their gluttony. It just goes to show that these fools need a firm hand to save them from themselves; otherwise they and the rest of us would have been dead day's back.

By placing a guard and tasking the daughter of the quartermaster to monitor our supplies, the issue was resolved.

It was a day or perhaps it was two days after the stores incident that gave me a day of awe, fear and utter revulsion.

It all started with a prayer answered when the heavens opened and blessed rain began to fall, the first rain I had felt on my face for what must be months. Someone once told me that it never rained here and I had believed them; until now that is.

It rained and rained and that was the trouble. The ground could not absorb such a downpour and all the excess ran riot, which ran down our trail washing it away, and

us with it. Some of us managed to hold our footings but many, our supplies along with it were not so fortunate.

As we struggled to gather ourselves together, the torrent had washed away an embankment of sand revealing an opening. People began to pull themselves into the cave mouth that apparently ran to some depth, but as I tried to encourage the horse and the camels into the shelter the stubborn things just would not budge and preferred to stand out in the rain. The blasted horse almost caved my skull in with a kick when I tried one last time to get it into shelter.

When I came too I heard talk of petrified trees, runes and an altar in front of a deep pit all of which were inside the cave. Now if the horse and camels did not want to enter, then something must be amiss, in my learnings I had been told to watch the horses for they knew of natural predators and the like so I warned people not to touch anything and stay well clear.

The next task was to try and recover some of our lost provisions. It was still raining and the light was fading but without food and water, all of which had been washed away, we'd last a day at most and despite the rain, I knew we wouldn't last long. I toiled late and recovered all I could whilst the rest of the caravan took shelter and tried to dry themselves as best they could.

Many hours later whilst I rested, one of the band, Gustav I think it was, came screaming from the back of the cave. His words called for the horse saying that it must be laid onto the altar and it's life taken.

The man must be delirious I thought and hastened to see what could have spooked him so, but he was adamant saying something about some of the group having ventured down into the pit and that without a sacrifice their lives would be forfeit. I couldn't believe what I was hearing, hadn't I earlier told people not to go deeper into the cave and then to cap it all I heard words that chill me even now and I am half afraid to even pen them now.

Perhaps the only man I thought I could rely on to aid me to bring these people to safety, Gregory von Denardov, a youthly squire also from the Empire, suggested a person as a sacrifice instead!!!!!!!!!!

So stunned and shocked am I by this that I cannot write any more on this episode.

As the days went by and our supplies diminished and the complaints rose about the lack of food and water, I was urged to again and again remind people that if it hadn't been for their laziness and greed our situation would be a better one, but Sigmar be praised, my resolve held true and I endured their ire.

One further thing I must add to these writings, the troubled and sickly woman, Gretel, once called out a name in the middle of a fit, 'Djann Azyat', I think it was.

The trail finally brought us to habitable and more importantly, cultivated lands. The trouble was, it looked as if an army had travelled this route before us and had stripped all but meagre offerings in its wake. There were no livestock and precious little food. We took a little of what was left but to leave even a heathen to starve to death is not the way it should be, so we pressed on.

Hills began to loom ahead of us and towards their shelter we headed. A mining settlement was our reward, with a large stream running through it and despite the

initial hostile reception, we learnt that they also faced troubles. Quickly we offered our aid and the hostilities abated, for now.

The man in charge was called Bash al'Birka and he worked this mine in the Valley of Echoes for the Kaid al-Talv.

We learnt that some spirit resided within the hills and it required a woman of magical talents to keep it amicable whilst the miners dug the ore within the rock. The trouble was that something had caused the woman in question, the Bash al'Sesame, to take leave of her senses and actually leave the mining camp. On top of that, the miners had shown signs of dissent and unwillingness to work.

With the aid of Gustav's wife, after a suggestion by Erhardt, the water supply was examined and the stream was found to be tainted with lead. Why this would have any affect I don't know but I was convinced that it was trouble and I suggested that water for drinking be drawn from above the mine before it could be tainted.

In order to restore order in the mine and hopefully gain the gratitude of the overseer of the mine, along with precious supplies, we left the main retinue at the mine and went in search of the woman with magical talents. She had been seen heading off deeper into the valley and apparently there was a place there where a bee keeper, the Bash al'Birza, called Suleiman Qudra, lived there with some helpers.

Our search led us deeper into the valley that was inhabited by enormous bees. After an initial encounter with said bees and sighting some evidence that suggested that the wizardess had indeed come this way, we managed to speak with the custodian of the bees.

We learned that the bees lived in a number of hives all over the valley and had recently began to be very offensive towards not only his employees, but to other hives as well which was totally out of their nature.

Having been given permission to explore the valley further, our trail led us to three particular hives where it seemed a battle amongst bees was waging. It was agreed that we try and approach the central hive to investigate further. Having fended off a number of attacks from the angry giant bees, we reached the hive and found a delirious woman within. Quickly we extracted her and returned to the mine where upon aid was sought from the nearby town to treat her condition.

Fortunately the overseer of the mine was generous enough to pay for the surgeon to treat our own wounds and now it would seem that we have gained the honour of receiving his master's protection, the Kaid al-Talv, as well and for now our safety is ensured but this is but a small plot of sand in a most cursed land.

Entering Talv we didn't seem to attract that much attention considering we were obviously northerners. There was a good deal of northern goods available for sale in the market and one or two people took advantage to replace lost items.

A group of six red garbed fellows entered the market place and made straight for a chap who was talking to a small audience. The red-garbed people laid into him giving him a heavy beating and then for some reason they spied us and decided it was our turn to be beating, inspiring the crowd in the marketplace to join them. Our escort drove us quickly to the Kaid's palace and to safety.

Whilst the others of our caravan were sheltered elsewhere in the town, we were assigned chambers where we could clean ourselves, in fact a fellow garbed all in

black came and shaved us and a few maids helped us bathe. What clothes we had were cleaned and we did our best to be presentable for the evening meal where we were to be presented to the Kaid himself.

One note worth mentioning, the man in black had a tattoo on his right wrist, a moon in a vultures talon.

The meal was a sombre affair because of the language barrier and no doubt also because of us being northerners and in fact an enemy of the Caliph who controlled these lands.

As we went to retire a messenger enquired if we would consider delivering a diplomatic message to Lugash for the Kaid, we said we would be happy to discuss the matter with the Kaid.

A short while later the Kaid visited us in our chambers, something I wasn't expecting and it turned out that one of his wives had arrived before us and was waiting for Gregory in his room. The situation took an even worse turn when one of the guards that entered with the Kaid, drew his knife and thrust it into the neck of the Kaid killing him instantly. The knife was thrown to our feet and other guards called for, naturally they assumed we had committed the murder and we had no choice but to surrender.

After spending almost two days in the dungeon, the new Kaid, the eldest son, decided to simply let us go rather than execute us. Our belongings were returned and we were told we had a day before the hunt would be on. Wasting no more time, we set off but not before the messenger from two nights ago once more approached us and still asked if we would take the message to Lugash. We agreed in exchange for some food and water and three days worth was instantly provided.

After three days and with no sign of a pursuit and only a brief encounter with a madman who scratched Gretel, we arrived at a fork in the trail by the bank of a river and at this fork was a trading camp. A short encounter with a large reptile in the river as we collected water was the only event and the following day we managed to buy a week's worth of food and water.

Turning north along the bank of the river inland and to follow the merchant route to Lugash, that avoided the coastal towns, we made steady progress.

A couple of merchant caravans passed us and after about four days we saw a strange apparition. A large castle was on the trail in front of us and walking its battlements was a armour clad female that looked strikingly like Ulrike, the daughter of the Quartermaster. What was even stranger is that a few days earlier, Gretel had spouted something about in this very image in one of her ramblings.

A small group of nomads had camped on the trail and a pair of them brought a sickly child towards us. The child headed straight for Gretel and one of them scratched her again, drawing blood, which he daubed over the deformed leg of the child. Of course some took exception to this treatment of Gretel, especially Gunther but things soon calmed down. As this fracas went on the child started to hobble away on his own and the nomads thought that some miracle had transpired and proceeded in presenting Gretel with a pair of pendant gifts, one of silver and one stone but both had a 'pillar' symbol inscribed on them. When I pointed at the pillar symbol to one of the nomads, he pointed to the sun that shown brightly in the sky.

Taking a break for a few minutes one of the Halflings and Kurt decided to head to the castle and stumbled across a large humanoid creature. They say they battled it for many minutes before having to retreat back to the rest of the caravan, bringing it with them. Well in truth it was the halfling that brought the thing to us, Kurt having taken an almighty beating and left behind unconscious and bleeding. It was quickly dispatched and the oddest part was that the thing seemed to regenerate. A bit of fire soon took care of that.

Anyway, surprise surprise, the castle was just an illusion conjured up by the heat haze and so on we went. The next four days proved uneventful and just made this cursed land more unbearable. Sand and dust gets everywhere, in your clothing and hair, your mouth and even tainting the food and water. How these people endure, Sigmar only knows. Thankfully we have now arrived at an oasis and a chance to rest and gather more supplies ... I hope.