

Having returned from the Vanguard patrol of last week I find myself once more at the edge of the Manganor swamp at the inn called from the ashes. Now held by the reader who seem to be doing some extensive rebuilding, they have stripped out all of the furniture and even taken down a wall of the building. Alliance patrols in this area are still being based here and patrols were being stepped up due to increased attacks on travellers here.

I was ordered to meet Sgt Orlando and a small ad hoc patrol which was to clear a path for another incoming patrol group led by Lupacuore. Our orders were to ensure the trail was clear allowing them to safely reach the area so that they could carry out some special orders here.

We had set out from the inn and covered some distance without problems when we heard howling from ahead of us, forming a battle line we made ready as we could hear movement and many figures crashing through the woods before us.

Then out of the woods came a horde of howling wolf like beasts, at least a score in number. They hit our line and flanked us at once. Sergeant Orlando and I stood back to back and tried to hold back the beasts while the others in the patrol fled before the attacks. Then the beasts ran on, chasing the few fleeing survivors and the good sergeant and I were alone with several dead beasts. We were both hurt, suffering from many wounds. The others were not in sight but we heard the howling moving away from us through the deeper woods.

Bandaging our wounds we set off to follow and try to find the other members of the patrol.

We had not gone far when ghouls burst from the woods behind us and attacked. Sgt Orlando was paralysed and fell, I faced the ghouls who fell back from me.

Then several Dymwan arrived. They seemed surprised to see me not only standing but also surrounded by a ring of ghouls. I explained who I was and asked if they had a healer for the sergeant. They said they were sorry about the attack, they were hunting the beasts and did not know there was an alliance patrol in the area. Due to the alliance they would not slay Sergeant Orlando but they would imprison him. I gave my parole and was treated more as a guest.

We were taken to the local Dymwan base where I met several priests and high priests. The sergeant was imprisoned in a tunnel and cave that was warded to prevent exit. One of the

priests escorted me to the base where she asked me many questions about my homeland, my King and myself.

The base consisted of a small barn like building, not much more than a roof and a few walls and a small fortified area with the undead pens. I was taken to the fortified area and spent a time chatting with the Dymwan. It is always a pleasure to be able to speak to people in this land who do not start spouting humakti lies or old women's scare stories about undead and necromancers. There were some strange undead in the pens, odd animal like ghouls. Several of them would from time to time start doing some strange form of dance. Perhaps the Dymwan are seeking to create entertaining undead.

Some time later in the day many raised voices could be heard approaching the fortified camp where I was sitting with the dymwan priestess, one was clearly recognisable as that of Ruele. A somewhat capable elf warrior who seems to spend all too much time drunk. With him was Lupacuore and her patrol, come to rescue me. Actually they seemed a little surprised to find me sitting, clearly unharmed, and chatting with the Dymwan. One or two of them seemed disappointed to see I was well.

I asked the Dymwan priestess Vella if I could join the others and she was happy for me to chat freely with the patrol.

As I joined them, we walked a short distance from the palisade when the undead pen opened and the creatures within were released. They quickly came towards us and attacked the patrol members. They seemed much like normal ghouls but from time to time let loose a great howl and for a minute or two fought like animals swinging wildly with weapons and striking hard blows.

Once these fell they released what seemed to be an embodied skeleton which then had to be crushed.

During the fight many of the patrol were paralysed and I spend some time gathering all the wounded and treating them, I also went to the Dymwan camp and asked the high priestess, Lady Katarina, to call off the attack. She agreed to do so but had a deal of difficulty with the ghouls beasts, several times they refused her orders and one even turned on her and had to be

driven off by her guards.

Finally the undead were recalled but by then Jack and Caleb had suffered mortal wounds and were dying. For some reason Lupacuore had been sent out on patrol with no elixir potions.

I told the group where I had seen Sergeant Orlando imprisoned and they began to search the area for the tunnels, these were found and we could hear the sergeant inside shouting for us to rescue him from the creature in there with him. Several members of the patrol went into the tunnels and located him but found one of the crimson feast creatures trapping him. Ruele fought and killed this creature but the group then found they were unable to leave as the wards across each entrance blocked them.

While this was going on Lady Katarina had arrived with her followers and we spoke for a short time. Finally she agreed to allow the others out from the prison if in return I kept her fully informed of what steps we took to cure the lycanthropy and what success we had. This I agreed to and the balance high priest with her dropped the wards. She then allowed us all to leave.

By now Jack and Caleb had passed on and we took up their bodies and decided to head back to the closest inn, the reader held from the ashes inn.

As we walked we bought each other up to date on the days events. Lupa and her patrol had fought the beast ghouls the day before and had also met and skirmished with the crimson feast creatures which were known as martoc's beasts. Several had been bitten but most of these had been cured by a Halmadonian patrol they had met.

These Halmadonians had been heading to the White Retreat. It seems that king Michael is ill and they had with them skilled healers who wished to lend their aid and support to the king and seek a cure for his illness. This was news indeed, the king had not been seen for some time but no word of this illness had been spoken and most simply thought him busy with the present troubles in both his own city and the alliance.

The patrol had met a group of crimson feast under the command of a true blood just after a

serious fight in which Lupacuore had been left dying. One of the crimson feast had been able to save her in return for a favour to be returned in the future.

We made it back to the inn to find it empty, several members of Lupacuore's group said the reader staff had been slain earlier.

We settled in with guards posted and many began to prepare food. I stood watch.

With a little peace it was possible to note who was part of the patrol, we now were:

Warriors: Squire Arithis of the Eternal Order Intendant Anti-paladin of the Fell Knights. Orme of the Iron Guard, Ruele the drunken but not totally incompetent elf and Caleb Xenosbait the slightly more useful elf. Sergeant Orlando of the crusaders, Kit also of the crusaders, Lupacuore who was leading the patrol, Kalliste a veteran warrior,

Priests: Akarra who is our main healer, Teppic who is a balance priest of some type and Jack the druid.

Mages: None

Scouts: Sun Tzu, Lysander who was a guide for local patrols

A solid core of warriors but no magic support. After a while a pair of Dyfadyn arrived and enquired how long we would be staying at their inn, they said it had been sold to the Dyfadyn that very day and they were now in control. They kept asking how long were we to stay there and who had we paid, several of the group tired to make up some stories about having paid another Dyfadyn who had visited, I simply said we would be there as long as our duties required us to be there.

The Dyfadyrn mentioned our dead and had some potions of resurrection for sale, much haggling went on but the end result was both were returned to the living.

Some kalid crimson feast arrived, the ones who had saved Lupacuore earlier. They wanted to speak to her privately.

I turned over guard duty to others and went into the inn to prepare some food and update my notes.

A while later I noticed a figure step up behind me and turned to find a valley scout who it seems, had walked into the building unchallenged and was sarcastic about the quality of our guards. She wanted to speak to Sergeant Orlando.

I took this period of relative quiet to consider what had happened today. It seems to me that the Dymwan are binding the spirit of a ghoul into the body of a crimson feast creature either before it is fully dead or after death but in some way trapping the beasts spirit there as well. Most of the time the ghoul is in charge but from time to time the beast spirit is able to reassert control and goes wild. Also most had been reported to rise as skeletons after death by the scouts who had hunted them down and slain them.

An interesting idea but the skeleton seems a little excessive and they need to develop a way to harness the strength and aggression of the beast spirit while still leaving the ghoul in command. As it is they are very difficult to control and can turn on their controllers. Perhaps if the idea is developed further it will provide some interesting shock troops.

The crimson feast left promising to return in the morning for an answer.

Lupacuore explained that as the patrol had promised them anything in return for saving her life they had now come to collect. They wanted the true blood that had been with them slain. This creature was their master and until it was dead they were forced to obey its commands. They wished to leave the crimson feast but the true blood held them here. His death would be payment for Lupacuore's life. She would need to find a silver weapon to slay him.

The valley scout, a pathfinder had reported that a group of pathfinders had arrived in the area and were setting up watch for us around the inn, she also delivered a pair of elixir potions, a little late but at least we now have some.

A shadowsfall arrived. He explained that he had stopped by to see what we were up. He and another were in the area, the leader of their group had been slain by a beast the day before and only the two of them were left to keep an eye on the activities of the crimson feast. The infecting of people with lycanthropy and then calling them to the crimson feast is being used to replenish losses in this particular kalid legion. But as both outlaws and city people are being drawn in the shadowsfall are looking into the matter to see if it violates any of the laws of the land.

He was told about the plan to kill the true blood and said that the only silver weapon he knew of in this area was in the hands of the leader of the Dymwan high priestess Lady Katarina.

He then left and most of the patrol retired. I sat by the fire and talked for a while with Orme, Jack, Kalliste, Lupacuore and Sergeant Orlando. We spoke of many things but I mainly tried to talk of alliances and of the problems caused by the openly expressed desire of a number of people in the patrol to attack the Dymwan.

Several thought that because the alliance with the valley was older it should be honoured while the new alliance between Wolfhold and the Dymwan should not be honoured. People spoke to me of the alliance law and Jack quoted the by action or inaction phrase yet again to explain why Orme and I should be joining the rest of the patrol in an unprovoked attack upon the Dymwan. I explained that a man who does not honour one alliance cannot be trusted to honour another and that all alliances are equally important to a man who is honour bound to uphold them.

Of them all only Orme truly understood my words, a half orc, a drunkard and no man of words or wit and yet he shamed those from the White Retreat and the Valley. He understands honour and duty whereas the others just seemed puzzled by my words.

Finally I told them I would try to negotiate with the Dymwan to see if we could obtain the loan of the spear without resorting to violence.

Getting no further I retired for the night.

I rose and broke my fast. I must note here the appalling condition of the inn since the reader has taken over. One entire wall had been removed and the other walls were boarded up. The doors were gone and the wind blew through constantly. The entire kitchen area was gone and the previously comfortable furniture had been replaced with rough-hewn wooden benches. All of these hardships are bearable in the furtherance of my duty but the place had no way to prepare toast! I was forced to settle for a bowl of some strange square shaped wheat items in milk.

I updated my journal and stood watch for an hour and more till signs of movement could be seen at the camp.

Then Lysander arrived to say the pathfinders were breaking camp and would be moving off soon, they had already recalled the guards. I went to the camp and shouted to rouse everyone, I received a response from Orme and some grunting from several of the others.

I returned to the ramshackle hall, sorry the reader inn, and resumed my watch. Orme arrived quickly along with the sergeant, Lupacuore arrived a few minutes latter and the others staggered in over the next half-hour or so.

The crimson feast people returned not long after this and spoke with Lupacuore to see if she agreed to repay the debt.

A reader scout arrived with a private message for Jack.

A blue wizard from the Concilium dropped in, he was on his way to the valley and thought to cut short his journey by making his delivery to us. He had a bag of dirt from Axos. Apparently a plane travelling item called the world window requires something from the destination land in order to transport there. This is presumably part of the Alliance response to the threat posed by the Axos peoples and in particular the followers of Geb who are mentioned in one of my earlier

journals.

A man in red arrived, he said he was of the reader although he was not wearing the colours of that city. He wanted to know what had been happening here and spoke to Lupacuore and Sergeant Orlando.

An alliance scout arrived just as a torrential downpour began. He asked what we had been up to and reported that he had passed a group of Dyfadyn who had a single reader with them, the reader did not look happy to be with them. Also it seems that reports of the inn being overrun by beasts may have been wrong, it seems one of the reader at least had been killed by an assassin slitting his throat. The Dyfadyn were moving away from us and we would have to hurry to catch up with them.

The scout gave Teppic directions, which involved a bridge, sand dunes and a left turn off the path over the ridge.

We assembled and set out into the driving rain. Conditions were bad and visibility was greatly reduced. Still our scouts moved out following the directions given except that we could find no bridge. The patrol sheltered as best we could in the woods while the scouts searched for this bridge. They could find nothing so we moved further into the woods. The directions given led nowhere so we began a circular walk around the area of the inn. After having walked several miles we finally came upon a bridge which led to sand dunes. Again we found shelter while our scouts searched and again we found nothing.

By now some two hours had passed and we were all thoroughly soaked. We decided to return to the inn to dry out a little and then our scouts could search once more.

We made it back to the inn and I stood watch while others ate and tried to dry cloaks and hoods.

Finally Lysander and the scouts found the correct route. Completely in the opposite direction to that given us by the worthless valley scout.



Once more we set out into the rain and wind. We found a trail and followed it along, pausing only to kill a few annoying hordelings.

Then the scouts reported figures in red ahead, blocking the path. One wore the eye of Morgoth symbol. These were easterlings, known to serve as guards and soldiers for the Dyfadyrn and a long way from their own lands.

We approached them and they ordered us to go back along the path. They said we could not pass. Some more pointless talking followed before the fighting began. They cast numerous of these strange sunburn spells and pushed hard against us. They fought till we slew every one of them.

We treated our wounded although the limited healing we had was becoming a concern and Teppic and Jack were both supporting Akarra's limited inner strength.

We then moved onward, our scouts ranging ahead of us though the woods. It was still raining and visibility was still poor.

The scouts reported more Dyfadyrn on the path ahead of us Two of them with a pair of brown elementals and a pair of green ones. We approached them and they also told us not to pass. They said the path was a dead end and there was no point going further but would not let us pass to see for ourselves.

We had one magical sword and a single magical blade spell between us so everyone else parried the elemental blows while Orme and the sergeant fought them. Earlier when the blue wizard had visited us he had offered to cast several small long duration static field spells on our warriors and I now found that with this spell running and an invocation of enhance reflexes the elementals could not hurt me. I borrowed one of the magic weapons, and proceeded to slay several of the elementals. Once all were dead the Dyfadyrn, who had not fought, fell back along the path and joined a large group of other Dyfadyrn and a single fellow in reader colours.

We quickly healed our few wounded and pushed onwards.

The large group of Dyfadyrn formed up to meet us, the leader ordered several to put the prisoner off to one side. Then as a group they came to meet us.

They were organised with a healer and several spell casters and their leader was a mighty warrior. They attacked us and we held firm, our fighting line took the best they could do to us and did not yield.

At one point they summoned some form of elemental which teleported behind us but was so quickly killed I did not even see what happened to it.

We pushed them back step by step and one by one we slew the lesser warriors. Then while the shield wall held them in place I was able to flank them with Caleb and Ruele. We engaged the healer and spell casters and slew one of the mages before they withdrew.

Surrounded now they could not escape and we slew the remainder. The leader was among the last to fall.

We treated our wounded and the rescued Reader and returned to the inn through the still poring rain.

The Reader said he was had been one of the inn staff. After recovering he left us to try and find a Reader supply caravan that was in the area so that he could return to the inn with guards and more staff.

At the inn we rested. Our healers mostly meditated, as did I having allowed others to draw upon my inner strength earlier. We also tried to dry out a little.

At this time we again spoke of the spear and of the Dymwan. I insisted that I talk to the Dymwan

to try and negotiate use of the spear. The others agreed they would give me a chance to settle things peacefully before they attacked the Dymwan camp.

With night approaching and no break in the weather we set out towards where we thought the Dymwan lab and base to be.

We walked some distance through the rain, passing through woods and more open land before coming upon the outer defences of the base. Four skeletal warriors blocking our path. These we engaged with our shield wall and save for one, which was able to get behind us, we slew them quickly.

Our wounds were bound or healed and we moved on carefully with our scouts ranging ahead of us.

Pushing into woods once more we came upon a large clearing with a number of beast ghouls and wraith like figures scattered around.

I spoke to one of the wraiths, trying to get it to take a message to its master that I wished to speak to her. Unfortunately it seemed somewhat stupid for a wraith and clearly did not understand what I wanted. While I spoke the beast ghouls had closed in and I quickly rejoined the patrol as fighting started.

We suffered a number of paralysed people during the initial fighting, I was able to drag these back to the path we had entered the clearing along. The scouts engaged the beast ghouls and slew them. The wraiths on the other hand pushed in against us leaving several people down. I engaged and slew one while several of the others surrounded the other and slew it.

This fight had been difficult, we suffered many paralysed which broke up our fighting line and the driving rain made it difficult to see what was happening around us.

With the fighting done we took stock and set out healing the many wounds we had suffered.

Healing was depleted and we decided to hold back Akarra's remaining strength, Teppic and Jack took up the healing and were able to restore everyone to health at the cost of much of their remaining inner strength.

Our scouts had pushed onward and once we were ready to travel we set off after them.

Across the clearing the trail entered deep woods and very hilly terrain. We climbed up a hillside and came to the top to hear sounds of battle ahead. We pushed on to find our scouts had engaged a wolf like undead.

This undead was far more bestial than the others we had fought, also much more cunning and tougher. It struck several blows then fled into the woods to strike again from another direction a few minutes later.

In front of us was an ancient ruin, some form of fortress perhaps. Several Dymwan were visible at the windows and some undead were lurking around the buildings.

I went forward to speak to them and found it was Lady Katarina and her followers.

I tried to strike a deal for use of the spear but was unable to do so. In truth we had little to offer for use of the spear and the true blood was useful to the Dymwan alive.

The remainder of the patrol had stood back and watched without trying to help in the negotiations. When I told them I was unable to strike a deal they moved off round the building and started their attack.

The bestial greater ghouls came out behind us but saw me facing it and vanished back into the woods. I then followed the others into the ruins to see what was happening.

Ruele, Caleb and Sun Tzu were skirmishing with undead through the ruins, Several of the others were engaging a mummy that blocked the way into the Dymwan base and sounds of fighting came from inside the base itself.

Once the mummy had driven the other back I was able to enter the ruin and found Kalliste and Jack fighting on a narrow stairwell, they were obviously overmatched and I ordered them to withdraw, which they did. I then went up the stairwell to find the Dymwan.

They held the inner building at the top of the stairs, a good defensive position. They also had Sergeant Orlando and Lupacuore unconscious at their feet.

The Dymwan were willing to talk to me so long as I took no action against them, as a sign of my intent I left my sword by the doorway. I was able to examine both the prisoners. Lupacuore had been drained of inner strength but the sergeant was on deaths door having suffered mortal wounds.

I spoke to the Dymwan who allowed me to call our healer Akarra to administer an elixir potion to the sergeant.

She came into the camp and used the elixir potion, on the way in she had been hit by the mummy and was diseased. She used the last of her inner strength to remove this diseased. One of the Dymwan escorted her out to avoid any more attacks.

Lady Katarina and her chief researcher wanted both the sergeant and Lupacuore for their experiments. The sergeant had been bitten by one of the beasts and was infected with lycanthropy. Lupacuore had been bitten twice in the past and was more strongly affected by the disease. Both would make excellent subjects for their research.

Sergeant Orlando tried to say that he was of more use to them alive, this struck the room full of Dymwan Necromancers as highly amusing. I truly believe he did not understand what his fate was to be.

The Dymwan said I could freely leave but I explained to them that as I honoured the Alliance between Wolfhold and the Dymwan so I honoured the Kern Valley Alliance. I could not abandon them to their fate even if that fate was a result of their own stupidity.

I ordered the few surviving patrol members outside to withdraw and stop fighting the undead around the ruins.

We spoke a length, Lady Katarina and I. Finally we were able to come to an agreement.

She agreed to allow those outside to withdraw safely, she would permit Sergeant Orlando and Lupacuore to leave the ruin and they could rejoin the patrol and leave the area. She also agreed to loan us the spear for a short time.

She placed a number of conditions on this. Firstly every member of the patrol must swear by what ever oath they would hold to that they would never again attack her unless in clear self defence. Secondly the spear was to be returned as soon as we had finished with it.

I left the ruin and sought the other members of the patrol. I found them a short distance away. They were out of healing, every single warrior was on the ground coughing and choking from mummy disease. Only Caleb, Ruele and Sun Tzu still stood to defend them. Had the Dymwan wished they could have walked out of the building and slain or imprisoned the entire patrol.

I spoke to each in turn to obtain their oaths. All were willing to swear that, except in clear self-defence, they would never again attack Lady Katarina.

I then returned to the building and explained this to Sergeant Orlando and Lupacuore. Lupacuore agreed, but for some unknown reason the sergeant kept trying to twist the oath. At first he muttered it, then he added that he gave it under duress. Finally he gave his word most reluctantly.

I added to this that I would return the spear upon my honour or take up arms against its theft.

After I had a few parting words with the Dymwan we left the ruin and joined the remainder of the patrol. We picked up those unable to move by themselves and carrying them we headed away from the ruins and the Dymwan Base.

Once my duties with Vanguard are done I will return to Lady Katarina at the Dymwan city and pay the price for the release of the patrol. I have given my oath of honour upon this.

This attack had been foolish from the start. The patrol was being allowed to leave only because of the generosity of the Dymwan and the debt which I, who had not participated in the attack, would pay. They had not listened to my words and now they found themselves alive because the Dymwan held to that same alliance they had urged me to break.

Yet as we walked through the woods heading away from the ruin I clearly heard several of the patrol discussing how they could twist the words of the oath or simply dishonour it outright. Such stupidity and dishonour saddens and sickens me. Why cannot these fools see that the only people harmed by their untrustworthy attitudes and lack of honour are themselves.

They complain the Kern Valley has many enemies and yet every attempt to make allies is met by treachery and deceit from the valley peoples.

I have seen more honour and trustworthiness in the Dymwan these last few moons of the Alliance between us than I have seen in the Kern Valley Alliance in the last half-year. Yet the White Retreat and Valley are quick to claim the Dymwan as the enemies.

Even as they walk away from certain death they seek to betray their own word and turn on those who generously spared their lives.

I have often heard over the last few moons many of the White Retreat or Valley say they see the problems in Wolfhold as being deserved. They often repeat that their own cities would be better off without Wolfhold. I would say the same. Until such time as the other two cities of the

Kern Valley are prepared to show honour or respect toward Wolfhold then it is Wolfhold that will do better without them. The alliance with the Dymwan is strong and can be made much stronger, it is the attitude of the folk of the other two cities that holds back Wolfhold and seeks to weaken it.

A strong Wolfhold, ruled with law and order, strengthens all that are allied with it. But a strong Wolfhold seems to be feared by others who would keep it the weakest city in the Alliance. Until such time as the cities of the alliance accept each other as equals this alliance will be weak and vulnerable to its enemies.

We walked the miles back to the inn through the constant rain. Finally we reached its shelter and a blazing fire was built up.

We rested and ate and tried to dry out our sodden cloaks and clothes.

I updated my journal on the evening's events.

A drow arrived, Abadon Dreamweaver. He wanted to speak to those who had struck a deal with him moons ago at the tangled web inn. He spoke with them at great length and they apparently had numerous strange visions to talk about.

The crimson feast returned. They spoke to Lupacuore. The true blood was in the area and planned to attack the Dymwan who were interfering with his recruiting of new lycanthropes.

It seems tonight was Orme's birthday and everyone was becoming drunk and boisterous. A great deal of humour began of which I took no part.

Before he left sorcerer Dreamweaver left a number of delayed spells on people, these could be activated up to sixteen hours later and held either static fields or spells which granted skill to use a spear. The latter being most useful as we had a silver spear to fight the true blood with



and none in the group could use one with any skill.

By now most were either drunk or trying hard to become so.

I retired for the night having managed to mostly dry my cloak and leathers.

I rose in the morning, alone as was usual.

I broke my fast with fine coffee and another bowl of these strange wheat lumps. The taste may be growing on me, as I am sure they tasted worse yesterday.

Lupacuore and Sergeant Orlando rose less than an hour after myself and joined me in the hall. I enquired as to the Reader and was told they had not returned last night. As we had no guards I maintained my watch while drinking another cup of coffee.

The others rose and joined us one by one, many staggering and bleary eyed.

A shadowsfall approached. She reported that numerous packs of crimson feast beasts were in the area and seemed to be assembling near the Dymwan stronghold where they were keeping the beast ghouls penned. The true blood was also approaching and we needed to hurry if we were to catch him.

We chased the late risers and made ready.

The morning was clear with a hot sun beating down from a clear sky so we left cloaks behind.

We set off through the woods heading towards the true bloods route towards the Dymwan.

We walked several miles through the silent and empty woods before coming to the sand dunes and hills beyond which lay the deeper forest and the Dymwan base. The woods were strangely silent. No doubt the presence of the crimson feast had driven off everything in the area.

Then our scouts reported crimson feast ahead, a small group heading towards us.

We formed up and advanced into a small clearing to engage them.

Our shield wall engaged the creatures and held their attention. I called Caleb and Ruele to join me and we flanked them. One turned to face us and I faced it while the others struck at its flanks. We took some heavy blows but cut it down and slew it. Then we went after the other three. Another turned to face us and the sergeant led the shield wall in surrounding and slaying another while the final one was kept busy. The shield wall killed their foe then engaged and slew the next while we kept the final one occupied.

With them all slain we checked our wounded and our healers were busy for a few minutes while the scouts moved ahead.

With our healing complete we moved after the scouts, heading into the deeper woods and drawing ever closer to the Dymwan base.

The scouts reported figures ahead, human in kalid colours. These were more members of the crimson feast but more human than the beasts.

They asked had we come to help our Dymwan friends. Lupacuore and the sergeant argued the Dymwan were not their friends, the kalid countered by saying that because the Dymwan were allied to Wolfhold and the Valley were allied to Wolfhold we were all allied together.

Incredible as it may seem a grunting savage from another city understands the alliance. Why cannot the valley folk understand it?

We wanted to pass, they did not want us to pass. Battle began. We formed up and advanced to meet them. One tried to flank us and was quickly isolated and cut down. The others were then surrounded and also fell to our blades.

Before we had even begun our healing the scouts reported many crimson feast at the Dymwan palisade just ahead of us.

We healed our wounded and made ready to advance. Our healing was being used quickly, once more Jack and Teppic took over the bulk of the healing to save what remained of Akarra's strength for emergencies.

We advanced to the palisade and engaged the crimson feast across the gateway. We held firm here and fought the beasts while the more human crimson feast held back.

The priest with them cast several invocations that drained our inner strength but we stood firm and dealt many blows to the enemy.

Then the true blood led loose a mighty howl and great terror fell upon us. All those bitten by the beasts were struck by this and forced to flee. This took most of our warriors from the line and as we fled the fighting formation broke behind us and the beasts charged out. Fighting quickly spread across the area as our formation was broken apart.

Akarra found me a few minutes latter and was able to remove the invocation that held me in such fear. I quickly returned and found a lone beast threatening others of the patrol. It was alone and I engaged it and slew it suffering some wounds in return.

As those driven away by the fear returned Lupacuore and the sergeant had reformed the fighting line across the gate and once more we threatened the palisade.

I paused on my way there to seek healing from Jack but found he had almost exhausted his inner strength. I allowed him to draw upon mine and he was then able to heal me. This took several minutes and when it was done I hurried to join the others.

As I approached the palisade I saw that Caleb and Ruele were at the back where a small entrance was but they could not enter because one of the beasts guarded it. I engaged the beast and pushed it back allowing them to enter the palisade where we found an unconscious Sun Tzu. They were able to rescue him.

I broke past the beast and attacked the crimson feast healer who fled across the area chased by the two elves. Several of the warriors and beasts turned to face my attack and with their line broken the other warriors were able to push in.

We cut down the common warriors and the beasts. The priest was caught against the undead pens and killed. Only the true blood remained and even our strongest blows did him no harm.

The silver spear was bought up and battle began in earnest as the heavens opened and the rain poured down once more.

The true blood was able to control those with bites and he called them to him one by one. We had to reach him by cutting down our own and did just that. Orme, Sergeant Orlando and Ruele all fell to our blows to clear the way to the true blood.

The true blood struck hard and often with twin axes. Only the one with the spear could hurt him and the bulk of his blows were directed against the spear wielder.

Our fallen littered the palisade alongside the slain of our foe. I had the spear and had struck

several blows when Lupacuore returned from being healed. She had taken a potion of great strength and struck heavy blows with the spear so she asked me to give it to her. I once more armed myself with my sword and set to parrying the blows swung against her and covering her with my own body. Jack and Teppic joined us with what little healing remained to the patrol and the four of us, all that still stood, took battle to the beast.

Forward we pushed then fell back before his fierce blows. Strikes that would split a tree were turned aside by sword or staff as we fought to cover Lupacuore from the true blood's attacks. Many of his blows smashed aside our guard and all of us were badly wounded but we did not falter.

Again and again Lupacuore attacked, blow after blow of silver wounding our foe. He began to stagger and we pressed the harder, forcing him back against the wall of the palisade. So hard was the battle that one of his axes shattered against my sword.

We forced him back and cut him down, Lupacuore running the spear through his heart and then taking his head from his shoulders.

We stood triumphant, ignoring the pouring rain that had begun as the battle had begun. Lupacuore had repaid her debt and we had stood against a mighty foe and slain him.

Akarra had been ministering to our fallen and we had used all the Elixir potions we had obtained. Kit and Sun Tzu had received elixir potions, Caleb had been saved by a guardian spirit. Sergeant Orlando had ordered the last elixir potion to be used on Kalliste and without being able to save him he fell to his wounds while his friends gathered close by.

Gathering up our wounded and dead we set out to walk the miles back to the inn where we would rest for the remainder of the day.

I returned the silver spear and the next day the whole patrol set out on the long walk back to the three cities.

