

## Introduction to the Final Report

Much time has passed since the last Crusade, and still I see people speculate much as to what took place. For the most part, the report submitted by Sir Zilvan Taranthson is largely accurate, although it omits a number of details. I shall not seek to duplicate his work, but shall instead supplement it with my own recollections from the time, though they have faded over the years. Let us begin with our penultimate night upon the final Plane...

### Night-time, Day Four

The Empire delegation, led by Senator Amadeus, were in negotiation with the Plane's leaders, looking to bring back with them a mighty weapon that would have unbalanced the Spheres and worlds as we know them. Make no mistake, to allow this weapon to fall into their hands would have had far-reaching and terrible consequences across many Planes, and to my mind eclipsed the import of the Crusade we were bound on.

As Zilvan says, we interrupted these negotiations in the usual Valley style, although matters were complicated as the Senator managed to covertly possess the mind of High Priest Lathrodec such that he would slay the next Alliance member he encountered. As the fight moved on, members of the Empire found the bodies of myself and Lathrodec where we both lay dying, and brought them to the room held by the Senator who ordered elixirs to be applied to us both. He was irritated, complaining that those dying were the ones he most wished to deal with. While recovering from the near-death state, Senator Amadeus tried several times to gain a binding oath that I would act as a spy for him in Wolfhold. Despite my precarious position, I of course refused – I have already chosen who I serve and told the Senator as much. The rest of the Crusading party managed to gain enough ground in the fight that the Empire returned Lathrodec and myself to the party.

The Senator explained to the group that a number of rules governed who could be selected as King. Over the course of the night much discussion was had, as we had already earlier selected what we thought would be our three choices (with my proposal, Lord Sebastian, at that stage being the leading candidate). Now the rules had shifted: we could not submit more than one person from the same Guild; and at least one of the group present must be put forward as an option. For each candidate, we must each select one person to represent them, and another to provide an opposing voice.

After considerable – and I mean, considerable – discussion, we finally ended up with Sir

Paullandiss, Sky and Duke Hanrow as our nominees, with Sky insisting he himself be put forward as he wanted among the candidates there to be a voice of 'the common man'. We were happy to let him stand in this capacity.

Let me also clarify another point. The late King Michael had been Tower Leader of the White Retreat and we regarded him as a King of their people. Thus, all present firmly believed that we were to be electing a replacement leader for the White Retreat, rather than of the Kern Valley Alliance as a whole.

### **The Last Day**

After fighting our way past the locals with their highly-destructive native weapons, we gained access to the Senator Amadeus, where we came before him in his capacity as descendant of the High King of Murandir, with the authority to confer the position of King upon the person of his choosing. With him was a small retinue of a handful of guards.

So we presented him with options as follows. I, Kevralyn, spoke up in favour of Duke Hanrow. A leader should have great vision, inspire and unite his people, and Duke Hanrow is well known for his remarkable capacity to do so, not least through his rousing speeches. Duke Hanrow was also one of the few remaining members of the original Royal Fellowship.

The counter-argument provided was that Duke Hanrow was old.

Another spoke up in favour of Sky, who is well-regarded by all those he meets, seeking fairness and justice for those that others would dismiss as having little import.

The counter-argument provided was that Sky was from the Valley Alliance Tower, not the White Retreat, and thus could not represent the people of the White Retreat.

I cannot recall either argument put forward on behalf of Sir Paullandiss, whose nominations were given last, other than that he had managed to lead this group in a commendable way.

### Negotiations

A bargaining session with the Empire Unit also ensued, as Senator Amadeus wanted something significant in exchange for naming the next King. At this point some members of the group became fractious - due to the persecution that the Empire once visited upon the Villagers who fled Murandir to Orin Rakatha - and had to be escorted to the back of the hall. Giles in particular voiced his great anger and refused to have anything to do with the Empire. Thus, it was Sir Paullandiss, Sky and myself representing each of our respective Towers in the negotiations.

Senator Amadeus essentially wished the Valley peoples to become in some way vassals of the Empire: they would not interfere with us on Orin Rakatha. However, we would also give our word not to disrupt their rule on other Planes.

In addition, the Senator wished tithes of ten percent to be given from each Tower to the Empire. Sir Paullandiss contended that if the Crusading group present could 'beat' the Empire group in a fight, then the requirement for these tithes would be withdrawn. Amadeus was confident of his group's strength, so he was amenable to this suggestion.

I on the other hand, flatly refused that Wolfhold would agree to submit tithes under any circumstances. After some consultation, the Senator suggested that we could send them slave labour instead, which I accepted under the same terms as Sir Paullandiss (as subject to the outcome of the fight).

We also agreed that Wolfhold and the White Retreat would receive and exchange ambassadors with the Empire, and those members of the Empire who travel to Orin Rakatha could expect and receive the usual ambassadorial privileges. This agreement did not apply to the Valley Alliance Tower, mainly due to Giles's outrage at such a suggestion.

We also gained a most important agreement in that neither group would return to their respective home planes carrying knowledge that the Empire had come to this land to seek.

### The Deciding Hour

After we had established this framework, Senator Amadeus withdrew for a private discussion with his men. He returned to announce the outcome of his decision. He rejected Duke Hanrow, saying: "I like not the sound of this old man". Instead, he declared that Sir Paullandiss had impressed him during their various discussions over the previous couple of days, pronounced him King and conferred upon him the sacred gift of Kingship.

With the day passing further into the afternoon, we then took up the challenge to 'defeat' the Empire's Special Unit. The 'winning side' would be the one who slew two members of the other side first. The consequences for the Crusading team in losing this battle would be the tithes and slave labour to be sent to the Empire from our Towers.

A long and vicious battle took place; Lathrodec was possessed again but swiftly taken down by weaknesses from Giles. The Senator himself was an exceptionally formidable opponent, each blow from his sword unleashed a mighty hammer of spiritual power. With our magical protections diminished due to the nature of the plane we were on, Verrick succumbed to the magical blows rained upon him and fell, dying. One more person down and the Empire would win.

The fight however turned with the disappearance of the Special Unit's "Navigator", a blue sorcerer of considerable talent, who teleported himself away from the melee. We continued to press, and with great effort, we slew two of their number. The fight ended. We were considered victorious over the Empire's Special Unit.

### **The Final Battle, And Eradication Of A Great Threat**

The Empire group then departed, and we found ourselves under attack once more from the locals on this Plane. Due to the presence of an alternative 'Sphere' in these lands, our magical and spiritual prowess was much diminished; though those of us who had gained the favour of the Nightfolk had retained more of our natural ability.

Having achieved our objective, we now sought to return to Orin Rakatha. The man who had originally summoned King Michael here, Stephen Faulk, was able to return the party in the same fashion.

However, there was a choice to be made. We could wipe out this alternative 'Sphere' and

restore the Magic and Power that our own Planes are awash with; which would forever end the threat of this weapon that the Empire had sought. This could be achieved if both a member of the Dayfolk and another of the Nightfolk were summoned simultaneously on the cusp of dusk. Stephen Faulk had the power to summon forth one of the Dayfolk. I could summon forth the Nightfolk. To my mind, it was imperative that we eliminate this threat and restore the Spheres as they should be.

Thus, as the Crusaders – particularly Verrick, who was almost slain once more - valiantly guarded the entrance to our tiny room wherein lay the portal to Orin Rakatha, Stephen and myself began summoning these creatures. I think I remember Sky offering to stay with me while I did so, but I persuaded him to return. The final member of the Crusading party passed through back to Orin Rakatha just before I completed the ritual.

The two Dayfolk and Nightfolk familiars arrived simultaneously with an explosive force that flung me back against the cold stone wall of the castle, the shimmering portal to Orin Rakatha slamming shut, and myself held, unable to move – the only one in a castle teeming with hostile fighters. I saw the Nightfolk and Dayfolk join hands, slowly and steadily striding out of the tiny chamber together. Beginning in their task to eradicate this other ‘Sphere’ and the deadly weapon.

The known way back to Orin Rakatha was closed, and had other members of the group remained upon this Plane, they may have been forever trapped there. But let none doubt the power of my allies, for I was found and returned, and indeed live to tell this tale of our Crusade.

## **The Coronation**

I accompanied Dreadlord Araikas to the formal ceremony where Sir Paullandiss was recognised as King and his followers swore the first oath before all assembled.

Verrick’s charge was annulled, at High Priest Lathrodec’s request.

The White Retreat also granted a boon to each member of the Crusade. Some wished for a more powerful weapon or better training, one even requested being made a Knight which was granted, and Erf declined his own. Of boons not used for personal gain, perhaps the most

interesting was Brother John who requested that he be granted permission to set up an offshoot of the Hospital in the Valley Alliance Tower, an idea that Dreadlord Araikas applauded. Sir Ruff was given leave to set up a 'Hospitaller Guard', for warriors who would be dedicated to protecting those of the Hospitaller Sect. Verrick has become Seneschal to King Paullandiss.

### The Aftermath

People continue to wonder much of the nature of King Paullandiss, perhaps citing stories from his younger days, and I ask who of great consequence has been so perfect throughout their life? For as the bards say:

*"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; because there is not effort without error and shortcomings; but who does actually strive to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement and who at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly. So that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."*

My own experience of King Paullandiss is that, while he is clearly of a goodly and honourable persuasion, he heeded the words of those of different views to himself; and listened carefully to the considered words from Wolfhold on our mission. He strove to bridge the natural divisions in the group and protect those within the group at all costs, even those who had just acted in opposition to his own nature, such as Lathrodec. His instinct is to protect the innocent, as he demonstrated when he feared the Nightfolk would attack the local villagers on Billingham, hostile as they were to ourselves. I did not hear him decry anyone based on their race, indeed he seemed oblivious to such things, and I consider he was willing to put much trust in myself which I would say belies the tedious racial stereotypes to which so many adhere.

The Crusade is complete;  
King Michael has ascended to the Good Sphere;  
Paullandiss is now King.

By my hand,

**Kevralyn Soulfire**  
**Information Officer for the Crusade**